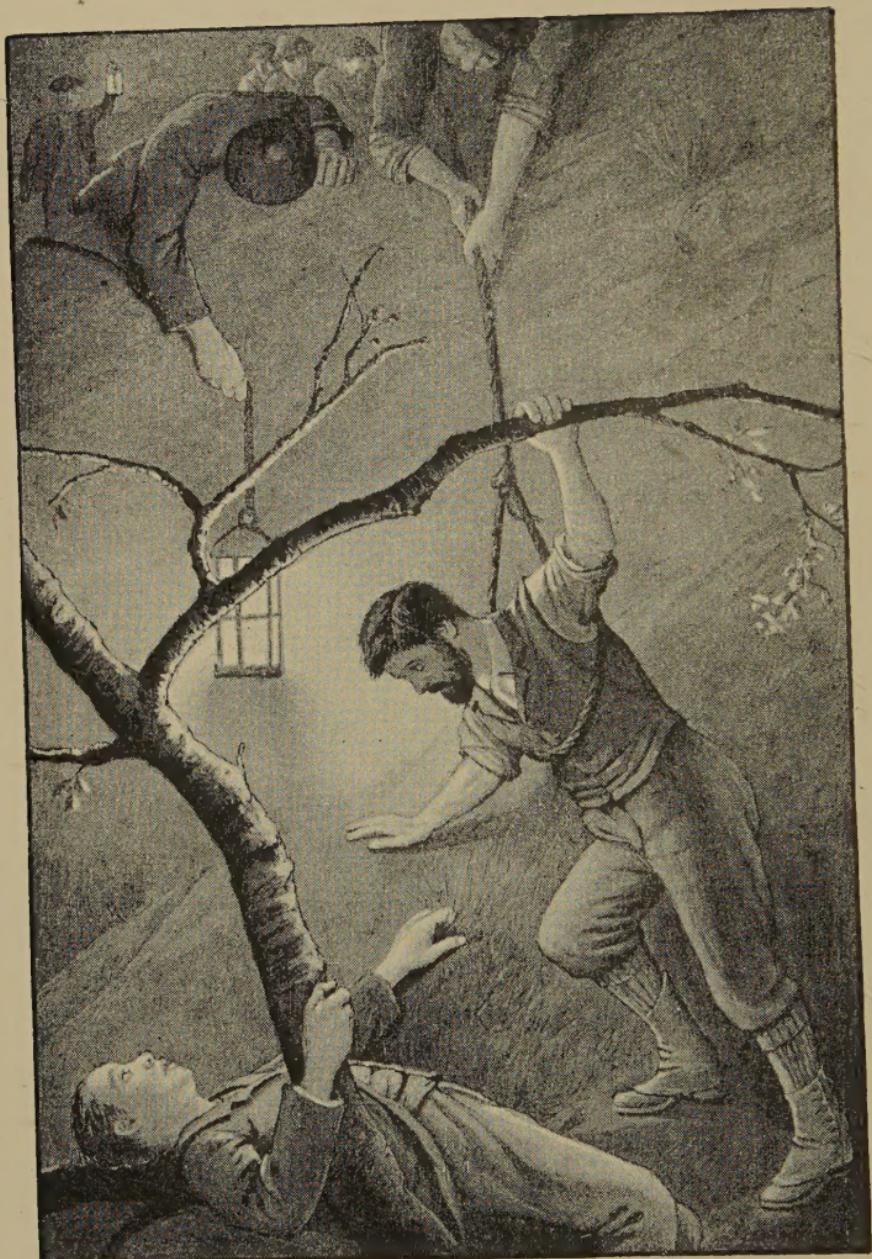


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A PRINCESS OF CHALCO



"Are you too much hurt to help yourself?"—p. 6.

Frontispiece.

A PRINCESS OF CHALCO

BY

A. WALL

With Illustrations

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LTD.

1892

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RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON & BUNGAY.

INTRODUCTION.

A VERY important question has been agitating my brain for some time past. It is this. "Shall I, Frederick Wrenforth, be considered an officious scribbler if I publish to the world an account of some strange adventures which befell me and my friend Dr. Gillett?"

I trust that this very hesitation, which I thus frankly acknowledge, will be the means of redeeming me from the stigma of being thought a lineal descendant of Baron Munchausen, for it shows that, at least, I possess the bump of modesty, and he would be a bold man who would venture to assert that modesty could possibly coexist with the faculty of Ananiatical exaggeration!

Nevertheless, it is a serious matter for a man to rush into print upon the slightest provocation, and I verily believe that my record of the strange events I passed through would have remained for ever in its pen and pencil condition, had not Gillett persuaded me that, by locking up in my own mind the knowledge I possessed of an interesting country and its inhabitants, I was guilty of treachery to the world in general, and to the Geographical Society in particular. Thus egged on by the doctor, who, I imagine, has a hankering after publicity in the fond hope of attracting patients and

fees (and his incomparable skill richly entitles him to them), I took up my pen and tried to make a connected narrative out of the disjointed fragments of my notes. Gillett ought to have helped me in the production of this work, but, when I suggested it to him, he flatly declined any responsibility in the matter, probably because he feared to have his name connected with such a dish of vile composition as he felt convinced I should serve up to the British Public. In revenge, I have carefully withheld the proof sheets from his inquisitive eyes, and, should he see anything in the book concerning his doings which he does not approve of, he has only himself to blame.

Every one has heard of the golden country of El Dorado, supposed by the Spaniards to be situated somewhere in the interior of South America between the Orinoco and the Amazon; and every one in the present day discredits its existence. But to the men of the sixteenth century it was a reality, and many expeditions were fitted out to reach and ransack it of its priceless treasures.

Gonzalo Pizarro, brother to Francisco the famous conqueror of Peru, was told by an Indian Cacique that there existed in the interior a fertile region teeming with gold and precious stones. Fired by the brilliant description, he equipped an expedition and sent it under the command of Orellana to discover the whereabouts of this El Dorado. Although Orellana followed the course of the Amazon down to the sea, he was unable to find the treasure he sought.

For many subsequent years, numerous attempts were made to penetrate to this auriferous region, yet all were doomed to utter failure. Sir Walter Raleigh, however, so convinced himself of its existence that he

persuaded Sir Ralph Winwood to obtain for him a conditional release from the Tower (where he had been confined since 1603), in order that he might equip an expedition which would have for its result the filling to overflowing of the coffers of King James.

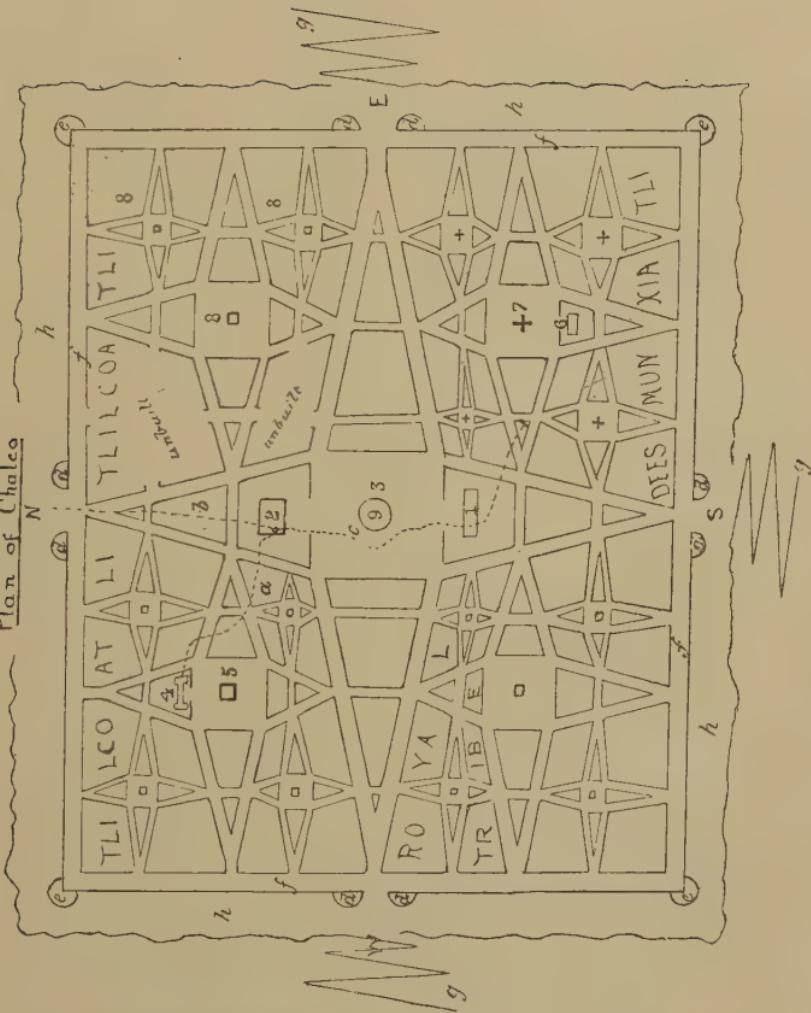
Having obtained the consent of the avaricious monarch, Raleigh set sail with a fleet of thirteen vessels, and arrived off the coast of Guiana in November 1617. Being aware of the ill-success which had attended the explorers by the Amazon route, he determined to reach El Dorado by way of the Orinoco. But Fortune was not more favourable to him than to others, and he was forced to return home a disgraced and discredited man.

Since the time of Raleigh, a host of minor adventurers have risked their lives to ransack the golden country of its treasures, but if any have ever succeeded in entering it, not one has ever returned to tell us the tale. In fact every one, by common consent, regards El Dorado as an idle fable, and if any enthusiast, a couple of years ago, had ventured to assert a belief in its existence, I should have given him a smile of derisive incredulity. But I can do that no longer, and the reasons for my change of belief are duly set forth in the following pages.

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1. Palace of Cephren.
2. Temple of Ra-teotl at the north end of—
3. The grand square.
4. Palace of Ambouli.
5. Pyramid of Tlilcoatl.
6. Palace of Amu.
7. Pyramid of Xexuteotl.
- 8, 8, 8. Provision market and manufacturing quarter.
9. Statue of Olmethi in the centre of the grand square.
 - a. The dotted line indicates the course of the subterranean passage from the temple of Ra-teotl to Ambouli's palace.
 - b. The underground tunnel from the temple of Ra to the outside of the city, and—
 - c. A third one leading to Cephren's palace, and continued slightly beyond into the Deesmunxiatl quarter.
 - d, d, d. Round towers defending each of the four gates of the city.
 - e, e, e, e. Four circular towers at each angle of the walls.
 - f, f, f, f. The Street of the Ramparts.
 - g, g, g. Broad zigzag paths leading down to the river which surrounds Chalco on all sides but the northern. The river turns abruptly to the west at the north-western extremity of the hill's base.
 - h, h, h, h. Level space beyond the city walls.

Plan of Chalco



For description of Plan see page viii.

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A PRINCESS OF CHALCO.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THAT *RARA AVIS*, A FRIEND.

NOVEMBER in the Highlands! Nothing ought to inspire a keen sportsman with a greater sense of gratitude than the associations connected with this phrase, for it suggests at once a vast expanse of well-stocked moor, a comfortable shooting-box, and the companionship of one or two friends whose geniality makes the evening pass so pleasantly after the hard work of the day is over. Truly my lot had fallen in pleasant places, for a large income enabled me to gratify my every whim, and I should have deemed life an utter failure had I been prevented, even for one season, from letting loose my passion for slaughtering grouse.

I had been settled here, in company with my two friends, Macpherson and Reay, for more than a month, but my intense ardour, whilst bracing me up to the highest perfection of health, had a contrary effect upon poor Reay. I literally walked him off his legs until his strength and courage gave way together, and he candidly confessed that he had had enough of it, and would travel southwards to recruit himself. On the afternoon before the day of his departure, a telegram arrived for Macpherson summoning him at once to his father, who had been suddenly seized

with a serious illness. I was considerably put out at this unexpected *contretemps*, which would deprive me of all society, and was half inclined to join them in their retreat from the Highlands ; but I gave up the idea as I reflected that there were many more birds to be killed, and that there were dozens of men in London who would not delay a minute in coming to me directly they received an invitation.

Thus comforted by the certainty that I should not remain a hermit for more than a few days, I drove my friends a distance of fifteen miles to the nearest railway station, saw them safely *en route* with a considerable amount of regret, loitered about the village and made a few purchases, and then drove back to a dinner which I should have thoroughly enjoyed, had I had but a companion to share it with. "Man is a gregarious animal." No wiseacre ever perpetrated a truer saw, for so intense was the burden of solitude upon me, that I was constrained to call in my gillie, and extract from his humble talk some consolation for the absence of the refined tittle-tattle of men in my own sphere of life.

The next morning, a heavy mist, enveloping the wide stretch of heather in its gray shroud, effectually stopped my shooting. There was nothing else to be done but to stay at home and idle away the hours in the most enjoyable manner possible. But how can enforced leisure be pleasant when a man's whole resources are wrapped up in outdoor exercise ? I devoured a sensational novel and a host of cigars between breakfast and midday, and then found myself eaten up with *ennui* ! Perhaps this restless weariness which so soon invaded my solitude did me some good, for I began to perceive the danger of a limited education, and mentally vowed that if Providence should ever bless me with a son, I would so train him that every minute and hour of the day should have some attraction for him, and that *ennui* should be an unknown quantity.

After lunch I became desperate, and seized my gun with the intention of sallying forth. Old Sandy, my gillie, warned me that the mist was thicker than ever, and made the moor a dangerous place to roam over.

"Ye'd best keep on the road by the kirk, sir," he added.

In my irritable condition, good advice was worse than thrown away, for it promptly induced me to follow the course which Sandy had pronounced hazardous. With an impatient exclamation, I passed through the doorway, and was soon striding rapidly over the soft and springy heather. The quick, energetic motion gradually restored my mind to its even balance, and then I began to enjoy the walk, although the rolling mist hid every object and obtruded its watery vapour into my skin. But action always destroyed any sense of physical discomfort; like Gallio, I "cared for none of these things," and revelled in the idea of being free to move whithersoever I pleased beneath the wide canopy of heaven.

Thus, like a giant refreshed, I strode aimlessly onward, conscious only of a keen exhilaration of mind and body which increased as the dull roar of waves dashing against the rocks suddenly broke upon my ears. I had walked very much farther than I originally intended, but the brine-laden sea-breeze tempted me to continue my course until I could stand on the shore and watch the big breakers hurl themselves defiantly against the crags, and then shoot upwards in a tower of foam and spray.

As the sound of the sea became more and more distinct, I noticed I had walked into such a thick bank of fog that I was in almost total darkness. Self-preservation dominated my animal spirits; I brought myself to a standstill, and took counsel for my safety. To go forward might involve my tumbling over the cliffs, which varied from two to three hundred feet in height; to go backwards was equally dangerous, for I thoroughly believed that people with no landmarks to guide them revolved in a kind of circle; and

if I were to do the same, one of the points in my circumference might lie just a little to seaward of *terra firma*. My wisest plan, of course, would have been to sit down and wait patiently until the fog lifted ; but the restless love of movement made me scout the idea, and I ultimately determined to go cautiously forward, and guess my position by the sounds of the sea. I also observed, at some distance to my left, what I imagined to be a faint flicker of light ; and if this proceeded from some fisherman's cottage, I felt sure of shelter until the weather permitted me to retrace my way in security.

With slow and careful steps I advanced in the direction of the light, which had now become invisible. In a few moments it glimmered out again slightly to the left of its former position, and I fancied I could distinguish the sound of voices. Evidently I had stumbled upon a group of cottages, and my only object now was to get to them as soon as possible.

Thoroughly reassured by these signs of the proximity of my fellow-men, I put all precautions aside, and went hurrying on to my haven of shelter, luxuriating in the thought that a stiff glass of "mountain-dew" would reward me for my long walk and drive away any lurking germs of rheumatism. Again the light flickered, and the voices sounded. With a sensation of pleasure, I stepped out more quickly, caught my foot against a boulder, and rolled headlong over it. My gun at that moment went off, and an audible shout answered the report. I groped about for the gun, but night had come on and mingled its pitchy darkness with the fog, so that it seemed a search very similar to that of looking for a needle in a haystack.

I was groping about on all fours, moving now in one direction, now in another, when, without warning, I felt the earth crumbling away from my feet, and in an instant I was sliding slowly and surely downwards. I made frantic efforts to grasp at something which would save my falling,

but only loose stones came in contact with my hands; there was nothing—absolutely nothing—to rescue me from the horrible death of being pounded out of all semblance to humanity by rebounding from rock to rock until my corpse reached the shore beneath. At last my aching arms gave up their hold on earth, and with a wild, despairing cry, I shot downwards into the horrible black void beneath me, and, as I fell, insensibility mercifully put an end to the awful feeling of horror which would have overwhelmed my reason long before the rocks could have crushed life out of my body.

A confused jargon of voices over my head, and little glimmers of light swaying to and fro above and around me, greeted my return to consciousness, and whilst I was wondering in an apathetic kind of way what it all meant, the recollection of my perilous fall flashed over me. I realized with a shudder, which made my bruised body ache all over, that I was jammed between a tree and the face of the rock in such a position that the least movement might precipitate me once more on a downward aerial flight. The dense fog which was the cause of my catastrophe had rolled away into the Atlantic, leaving the night dark, but clear enough to permit me to faintly distinguish objects at no great distance.

A loud shout, mingled with cries of "There he is," arrested my attention, and presently I saw a figure slowly swinging in mid-air above me. Some brave fellow was making a perilous effort to release me from my precarious resting-place, and I vowed, as I watched him coming nearer and nearer, that he should be rewarded with the best fishing-boat money could procure. As he approached, numerous lanterns were let down to guide him in his search, and by their light I could now distinguish the set, determined features of my deliverer. It seemed strange afterwards that in my moment of peril I could find time to speculate upon the character of the man, as delineated in the face

which he bent over me. As he rested his feet upon a narrow ledge of rock, and steadied himself by grasping a bough of the tree which had so providentially broken my fall, I fancied that he was deadly pale, but that his mouth was set in all the firmness of indomitable resolution. I at once recognized a being possessed of an iron will coupled with enormous moral courage—a being who would allow no obstacle to drive him away from a course he had marked out for himself as right. Then the few words he addressed to me proved him to be a man of decision.

"Are you too much hurt to help yourself?" was his question.

"I am afraid my leg is broken, but I will try my best."

"No," he answered abruptly. "Keep quiet, and don't attempt to move until I give you leave. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I answered, forced into obedience by the peremptoriness of his tones.

My deliverer relapsed into silence, which he occupied by busily cutting a number of branches from the tree. When he had gathered sufficient for his purpose, he signalled to his friends above, who responded by slightly lowering him until his shoulders were on a level with my knees. I was helplessly staring at these extraordinary preparations, and wondering what they all meant, when he again spoke.

"Which leg is broken?"

"The right," I answered, taking a lesson from him in brevity.

His next proceeding showed that he possessed foresight as well as resolution and courage, for he gently placed his bundle of twigs around the fractured limb and fixed them firmly in position with his handkerchief, which he had already torn into strips for the purpose.

"There!" he exclaimed, when he had finished his work. "We can now drag you over the rocks without much fear of converting a simple fracture into a compound."

A few more minutes were expended in fixing me safely to a rope, and then a cheer from above announced the fact that willing hands were hauling us up to *terra firma*. When my head appeared above the cliff, the cheers redoubled, and the honest fishermen gently and tenderly helped to lay my exhausted body upon the ground.

For a short time a kind of faintness overcame me, which my rescuer conquered by administering a dose of whiskey. As the dizziness cleared away, I recognized my gillie, Sandy, bending over me.

"How did you get here?" I inquired.

"I've been following you nearly ever since you went out," he answered. "I knew you were bound to come to grief if you went wandering over the moors, so I called a few men together, took our lanterns, and had been seeking you for hours until your gun going off told us where you were. Fortunately there was a fishing hamlet close by, and, as it was our firm conviction that you had stumbled over the precipice, I sent there for ropes and help. These came quickly, accompanied by the doctor who happened to be in the place."

"The doctor!" I ejaculated. Then it struck me that the man who had so courageously rescued me from death, and minimized the danger I incurred from a broken limb, was this self-same doctor.

I turned round to look for him, but he was busily engaged some distance away. Presently he came towards me in his shirt-sleeves, and I perceived that his kind heart had prompted him to go coatless on this bitterly cold night, in order that he might extemporize a comfortable stretcher for his wounded patient. The man's whole conduct seemed to be actuated by such a wealth of tenderness and thoughtfulness for others, that it forced me to contrast it with my own wasted and selfish existence, and the comparison overwhelmed me with shame.

After a long and painful journey, I finally passed through

my doors again, and was carried to bed, where I knew I should have to remain for many weary weeks. Dr. Gillett put my leg up into proper splints, administered a sleeping draught, and, after promising to see me again early in the morning, took his departure.

Day succeeded day with wearisome persistency, and each so exactly resembled the other in its monotonous sameness, that I should have hailed an earthquake as a welcome relief to this horrible life of inactivity. I am afraid poor Sandy had a hard time of it with me, and on one occasion his mere appearance at the door threw me into a state of violent irritability. He had not opened his mouth, but I knew that he was going to repeat the same eternal, stereotyped question, "What will your honour please to have for breakfast this morning?" Had the dolt had the sense to vary the words of his formula, all would have been well, but as he was foolish enough to make himself part of the endless monotony, I could stand it no longer. The moment he entered the room, and uttered his preliminary cough, I seized a pile of books and hurled them, together with numerous objurgations, at his devoted head. The poor man dodged them in a most ludicrous manner, and finally escaped from my presence, shouting to the other servants that he was going to fetch the doctor, as "Master had gone mad!"

This brought me to my senses. I rang the bell, and no answer coming to my impatient summons, I rang again violently. Finally, three shivering men appeared at the door, and tremblingly begged me to keep calm! I saw at once that they thoroughly believed that rascal Sandy's report respecting my mental condition, and their terror so amused me that I burst into a hearty laugh, and for a few minutes managed to extract some real enjoyment out of my life.

But Sandy had been so impressed by my maniacal violence, that he had saddled a horse and gone to fetch

Gillett. I only became aware of this when they both entered my room together.

"Be careful, doctor," muttered Sandy. "He may have his gun with him."

"Get out of the place, you idiot," I roared, with a considerable amount of real anger.

Sandy vanished without any further persuasion, and I was left alone with Gillett. I apologized to him for my servant's stupidity in fetching him unnecessarily, and explained the scene which had induced Sandy to think I had taken leave of my senses.

"Now that I am here, I will stay and have a chat with you," replied Gillett.

"You are very good," I answered. "But should I not be keeping you from your other patients?"

"Patients!" he retorted with a grim laugh. "I have exactly six, counting you, so you may guess that my time is not too heavily occupied."

"For my own sake, I am glad to hear you say so, as I hope to be able to lay your society under contribution; but with such a small practice, you must suffer a great deal of anxiety?"

"You are right," said Gillett. "My means are dwindling to such infinitesimal proportions that I am meditating a move to one of the colonies."

"Whatever induced you to set up in this outlandish district?" I asked.

"Because I was promised an appointment worth three hundred a year. I daresay you have seen the Sanatorium just on the outskirts of the town of X—? Well, the senior physician of my hospital in London pledged himself to get me appointed Surgeon to it, and on the strength of his word I came to X—, and complied with the etiquette of the profession by calling upon the three doctors who were practising there. I must tell you that the Surgeon to the Sanatorium has the privilege of being allowed to see private

patients, otherwise there would have been no necessity for me to call upon my medical *confrères*. The first I visited was Dr. McSelkirk, reputed to be the leading practitioner in the town.

"‘Ah, Dr. Gillett!’ he exclaimed. ‘I hear that you intend to increase the medical force of the town! Have you well considered the gravity of such a step? Unless your private means are ample, I am afraid your chances are very small indeed. There are only about six good families in the district from whom really remunerative fees can be earned; the tradespeople of the town are poverty-stricken, and as for the fisher-folk, they are generally on the verge of starvation. Think it over carefully, Dr. Gillett, otherwise you may starve before you can earn a pittance.’

“‘But I shall derive a fair income from the Sanatorium appointment,’ I replied.

“Dr. McSelkirk pursed his lips, and looked at me with a distinctly malignant glare. ‘Is that the way they arrange these affairs in London?’ he inquired. ‘I imagine that our Scotch Committee may have a word or two to say in the matter first.’

“‘Do not misunderstand me,’ I replied, seeing that I had aroused the jealousy of this local magnate. ‘I am simply promised the support of the London Committee.’

“The second doctor I called on gave me much the same advice and evinced just the same jealousy as did Dr. McSelkirk. The third doctor was an original, who burst out into furious invectives against the other two, and begged me to set up against them. He informed me that I could live by selling Gillett’s elixirs or Gillett’s cordials to the poor people who could not afford to pay for advice. I thanked him and went my way, feeling that this struggling man was much more of a gentleman at heart than either of his two more prosperous brethren.

“When I received the Medical Journals the following week, I found that they all contained anonymous letters

complaining of the contemplated nepotism of the X—Sanatorium Committee. For some time a furious paper warfare went on, and when at last the day of election arrived, Dr. McSelkirk headed the poll ! Thus, you see, I have no longer any *raison d'être* for remaining here, and had it not been for your accident I should have been in London three weeks ago."

"That McSelkirk deserves to be kicked," I exclaimed indignantly. "I can see plainly that it was he who wrote to the papers to prevent an interloper from interfering with local affairs. I should like to start you with a carriage and pair, and pit you against him. Come, you saved my life, and I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, and this would only be a small way of showing it."

"No, no, I will not enter the lists with such little-minded carrion as that," said Gillett. "But I am deeply sensible of your kindness, and only regret that I cannot accept it. The Colonies want able-bodied Englishmen, and somewhere out in Australia or New Zealand I may make a comfortable home with less trouble and heart-burnings than I can here in England. There is but one drawback to expatriation, and it is the long, perhaps final, separation from all one's relations."

A few days after this conversation, I prevailed upon Gillett to take up his quarters with me, and I became so delighted with his companionship that I made up my mind to keep the house free from visitors, and give the birds a respite from slaughter.

Time no longer hung wearily on my hands, for the doctor well knew how to soothe the irritability of *ennui*, and how to keep my mind constantly employed. He even succeeded in interesting me in Egyptian antiquities, and out of the dry dust of thousands of years ago raised up such a realistic picture of earth's early inhabitants, their ways and methods, that I took to the study with absorbing

interest, and began to complain of the shortness of the days !

If ever there was a magician, Gillett was one. His calm, grave countenance and his kindly gray eyes would inspire the most hopeless with confidence ; whilst his quiet way of leading the thoughts of his patient from irritability to cheerfulness, was one of the mysteries of psychology which I imagine he alone had fathomed. Under his care I became a different man. The mere delight in a physical existence gradually blended itself with a newly-awakened love for the Intellectual, and, with Gillett's instructive society, I ceased to pine for the rapid, restless life which had hitherto been my normal condition.

About a week before Christmas, I was permitted to hobble about the room with my leg encased in plaster of Paris, and a few days after this, Gillett informed me that as I was going on so well, he intended to spend the festive season at his home in Sussex.

I was very sorry to hear this, but would not endeavour to dissuade him from spending probably his last Christmas with his parents. I sighed, and openly envied him the possession of relations whilst I was alone in the world, the sole survivor of my family.

" If you can put up with a quiet country' rectory," said Gillett warmly, " I am sure I can promise you a hearty welcome. It will hasten your recovery to get you out of this land of cakes and mist, so accept my offer, and I will write to announce your coming."

" I accept with pleasure, my dear fellow," I replied. " I will cheerfully follow whithersoever you direct, for you have made your friendship a necessity to me."

" Ha, ha !" laughed Gillett. " You are developing a new symptom which may require an operation if—"

" Whatever is it ?" I interrupted, half alarmed.

" The fact is," replied Gillett, " your tongue is wagging in the direction of flattery. It is an abnormal course for

it to take, and should it increase to any great extent, I should have to recommend the division of the hypoglossal nerve."

" Which means that I should never be able to speak, much less flatter again ? " I asked.

" Precisely so ! " replied the doctor.

I was heartily glad to turn my back on the Highland moors, for the experiences of the last seven weeks had considerably reduced my physical vigour, which I hoped to recruit by a visit to the south, aided by the invariably cheerful temperament of my friend. The journey was fatiguing, and caused some discomfort to my leg, but here again I was indebted to Gillett's ingenuity for relief, for by means of cords and pulleys and various other contrivances, he at last swung the injured member in such a way that all pain soon ceased.

The most hearty and hospitable of welcomes awaited my arrival at the Rectory, and the next fortnight passed away most peaceably and uneventfully, except that I had now discarded all splints and was able to walk very well with the aid of a stick. Then a day came when I perceived a gloom to pervade every member of the family. It was so perceptible that I took an early opportunity of getting Gillett alone and asking him whether any bad news had been received.

" So my doting family have not been able to conceal their grief from you ! " said my friend, in a voice very far from lugubrious. " Perhaps you will marvel when I tell you that I am the unhappy cause of all this misery ! But to be serious. I had to inform my people of the utter failure of my schemes for the future, and the dire necessity for emigrating. My father would not hear of it ; he offered to continue my allowance and do anything he could to further my prospects in England. But look here, Wrenforth," Gillett continued in a serious tone. " I do not intend to be a drag upon my father's small income any

longer. He has stinted himself to give me a good education and a noble profession. I am therefore well equipped for battling with the world and its ills. Besides, as you know, I have little brothers and sisters who will soon require more instruction than can be given at home, and I should be worse than mean if I stayed on here with all this extra expense overhanging my parents. There, now you have the whole secret in a nutshell."

As I listened to his explanation, I felt an intense longing to be able to offer this right-minded fellow something substantial out of my abundance. But such is the pride of human nature that I knew he would consider an offer of this kind as an insult. Suddenly a brilliant idea seized me, and it seemed so feasible that I carried it into execution then and there.

" You are sure that you can do nothing better than go abroad ? " I inquired.

" Perfectly sure," responded Gillett. " If I had ever such a little income I would attach myself to a hospital, and wait patiently. But as I have not the means even to buy a small partnership, I must perforce go to a land where it is not considered *infra dig.* for a gentleman to black boots ! "

" Now, look here, Gillett, I have a proposition to make to you, and it emanates from your having dosed me with such a quantity of Egyptian antiquity. You have inspired me with a desire to see, with mine own eyes, those marvels whereof you have given so many graphic descriptions ; you have, in fact, imparted to me a strong inclination to see other lands besides England. To do this I must have a *Fidus Achates*, who shall be doctor, companion, and friend in one. Now comes my proposition ; will you accept the post with all the emoluments appertaining unto it, which would, I think, enable you to buy the small partnership you mentioned a few minutes ago ? "

"Are you serious, or are you merely creating the post out of sheer good-nature?" asked Gillett excitedly.

"I am actuated by pure selfishness," I replied laughingly.

"Then God bless you for it, for I shall now be able to relieve my dear old mother of her dismal foreboding that we should never meet again."

So the bargain was concluded, and the Rector and his wife made happy by the knowledge that their son would only be absent a year or two instead of half a lifetime. As for myself, I was exultant at the success of my diplomacy in keeping at my side that extraordinary *rara avis* yclept a friend.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOCTOR LOSES HIS GRAVITY AND HIS IDEAS OF *MEUM* AND *TUUM*!

FOR nearly two years after leaving England, Gillett and I had been roaming over the face of the earth, busily occupied in acquiring a practical knowledge of many countries and the wonders they contained. The antiquities of Egypt, far from quenching my thirst for exploration, served to confirm it. The surprising magnitude of the Pyramids and the mystery overhanging these eternal, silent witnesses of Earth's early manhood, made an impression upon my mind never to be obliterated; whilst the mild, gracious, and tranquil softness of the Sphynx—a tranquillity enhanced by its colossal proportions—transfixed me with a sensation of awe. If it be true that in vastness, whatsoever its nature, there dwells sublimity, then truly for the first time in my life, I stood face to face with the sublime!

From Egypt we directed our steps to India, and after viewing the rock-hewn temples of Elephanta, visiting some of the most noted cities, and making our *salaams* to a few famous chiefs, gradually worked our way to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and finally found ourselves at Lima, where we intended to remain for a few months for the purpose of studying the old civilization of the Incas.

Our two years' expatriation had made us both a little homesick, Gillett confessing to being anxious to revisit his quiet Sussex home, and I being eaten up with a desire to

walk on the shady side of Pall Mall. We had therefore agreed that when Lima ceased to offer any further attraction, we would work our way up to New York, and thence take ship for the overcast sky and dismal fogs of dear old England.

Barely had we been a month in this *Ciudad de los Reyes*, as the founder boastfully named the city, when a severe fever broke out which soon caused a terrible mortality. An enormous exodus of the wealthier families took place, and Gillett and I began to think about following their example, although we were very much annoyed at being forced to break off our interesting researches.

The doctor and I were sauntering through a grove of orange-trees in the *Alameda* when we finally determined to quit the city of spires and domes and fevers within twenty-four hours. Gillett had discoursed, as was his wont, most learnedly upon the danger of inhaling these Peruvian microbes, with the object no doubt of hastening my homeward steps; and having carried his point, broke out into unmeasured invective against the sanitary authorities of the town, whom he accused of encouraging epidemics by their disgraceful ignorance of the most elementary laws of Hygiene, and by their criminal negligence in the matter of drainage.

I smiled as the doctor waxed hot in his righteous indignation, and as his words became more rapid and increased in length by reason of their becoming more and more technical, I threw myself upon a seat and burst into a prolonged peal of laughter. This brought the angry scientific oration to an abrupt ending, and the orator turned and faced me with an expression of pitying contempt.

"For goodness' sake," I ejaculated, "don't increase your animal heat up to fever temperature by getting irate on this tropical day. If you continue your angry Philippics much longer you will die of heat apoplexy. But I promise

you that I will have engraved on your modest tombstone, 'Here lieth another martyr to science.'"

"Don't be a fool, Wrenforth," was the unflattering rejoinder. "Is it not sickening to think that men, women, and children are condemned to die off because a lot of blundering idiots who hold the reins of office are too idle or ignorant to keep this otherwise beautiful city in a state of cleanliness? You may laugh at my anger if you like, but it is just, for the pestilence which is filling the air with cries of anguish and bereavement could have been easily prevented."

"Why don't you go to the authorities and set them right, instead of venting your indignation on me?" I asked, stifling a yawn, for the intense heat began to make me drowsy.

Gillet uttered an angry exclamation, and threw himself impatiently on the seat beside me. I waited for his next outburst, with the malicious intention of converting it into ridicule, but he wisely maintained silence, and I, soothed by a soft balmy air stirred up by a gentle breath of wind, fell fast asleep.

I was dreaming most peacefully of a pleasant life in London after the vagabond existence I had endured for nearly two years, when a blow in the face, delivered by an unseen hand, disturbed the current of my thoughts and aroused me to wakefulness. Instinctively my hand went up to grasp the offender, but it seized nothing more dreadful than a dirty scrap of paper which had evidently been caught by the breeze and blown into my eyes. Dreams are marvellous arrangements, whereby the least occurrence is distorted and exaggerated, so that the faintest sound becomes magnified into the thunder of artillery, and the slightest touch assumes the character of a violent blow! Although I possessed ocular evidence of the cause which disturbed my slumber, yet it took me some moments longer to shake off the impression that I had been struck

by a concealed enemy. I looked at Gillett, with a vague idea that he might have been trying a practical joke; but he was sleeping grotesquely and sonorously with wide-open mouth!

With an anathema on paper in general, and on this piece in particular, I was about to crumple it up and cast it from me, when I caught sight of some writing upon it which seemed to be in antiquated English. Instead of throwing it away, curiosity prompted me to smooth it out and endeavour to decipher the quaint, cramped characters. I had not much difficulty in doing this, for although the ink was faded, and some sentences wholly obliterated, it did not differ very much from the penmanship now in vogue. Its reading, after all, was not so interesting as I had imagined it would be, but as it was destined to exercise an enormous influence on my future career, I here transcribe it.

“ November 9th. Poor Buttler just dead, and now I am alone among these extraordinary Atlicaligui. King Manethi has ordered a funeral such as is only accorded to a descendant of the Gods grief is more than I can bear cruel fate here to Chalco ? comfort that I succeeded where Raleigh failed. Here El Dorado much treasure precious stones. It is no myth, yet I would give all for in Devon.”

“ What can it mean ? ” I soliloquized aloud. “ Has some poor madman persuaded himself that his prison cell is the golden country, and that the bars which keep him from dashing himself to pieces in the courtyard below are made of the precious metal ? Or have I here a fragment of a manuscript of an old romancist ? ”

Here my meditations were stopped by a shadow being cast over the paper, and, looking up, I perceived a tall, fine-looking Indian standing in front of me.

“ Will my white father restore the charm ? ” he asked in a calm, dignified manner.

I was at a loss for a moment to understand what he meant, but when he pointed meaningly to the scrap of paper in my hand, and accompanied his gesture by an adoring glance at it, it began to dawn upon me that he regarded it as something precious. I was therefore about to hand it back to its owner when Gillett awoke, yawned, and stared with sleepy astonishment at seeing me in conversation with this son of the Pampas.

"What does the 'untutored savage' want with you?" he inquired.

"He is offering to sell a charm to stop the fever at Lima!" I answered mendaciously.

"Is it a drug?" asked the doctor, thoroughly rousing himself. "It may be worth investigating, for some of our most valuable remedies have come from South America. For example, quinine, or Jesuits' bark, as it used to be called, was discovered——"

"It isn't a drug, it's a paper," I interrupted hastily, for I knew that if I once permitted my medical friend to launch out into a lecture, I should not be able to stop him until he was exhausted.

"Bah!" ejaculated Gillett with disgust. "I don't want to see it. I know the old trick. You write some mystic words on a parchment, mutter a prayer, then soak the ink off in some water, and make the patient drink the vile solution. If he recovers, you have cured him; if he dies, it is his own fault!"

"I did but chaff, O grave and reverend signor!" I replied. "But it appears that this remarkably ancient and dirty piece of paper, which the wind blew from out of his apology for a waistcoat into my face, is regarded by him as a potent charm against something or other, and he was demanding its restitution as you opened your eyes to sublunary affairs."

"Your eyes will perceive nothing but Lunar affairs, if you go on like this. In other words, you are qualifying for a lunatic asylum," answered the doctor.

"Never mind!" I replied. "But do look at this document before I return it. It must be at least a hundred and fifty years old, and it speaks of El Dorado as if it were a reality."

"You have got hold of a leaf out of an unpublished manuscript of romance," said Gillett. "But hand it to me, and I will inspect it."

He took the paper and commenced to examine it in a listless fashion. Suddenly his manner altered from indifference to intense eagerness. He studied the document for some time with the deepest attention, twisted it round in every conceivable direction, held it close to his eyes, then placed it some distance off as if endeavouring to fix the exact locality of every speck of dirt on the begrimed object. Having apparently accomplished this to his satisfaction, he next put it to his nose as if desirous of saturating himself with its musty odour of antiquity. His whole aspect was so ridiculous that I went off into fits of uncontrollable laughter, and begged him to return the Indian his property, as the pantomime it caused was too killing!

"His property!" he exclaimed, in a snarling, snapping tone, totally unlike his usual cheerful accents. "It is much too valuable to return into the possession of that Redskin, for it is nothing more nor less than a clue to the whereabouts of a country hitherto regarded as mythical. In it we have El Dorado's real name revealed probably for the first time to any European, for this Chalco must either be the region itself or its chief city. If it should be identical with the place mentioned by the Indian Cacique to Pizarro, I venture to think that we are on the verge of an important discovery."

"Has it escaped your memory that Pizarro called the capital of El Dorado by the name of Manoa?" I quietly asked.

"Pooh!" ejaculated Gillett angrily. "The Spaniard was deceived by his informant. That's clear enough."

" You have a remarkably easy way of disposing of all argument," I replied. " Nevertheless, I am rather astonished that a man of your scientific education should be so easily thrown off his mental balance by the mad emanations of a crack-brained Englishman. The evidence that El Dorado ever existed is not worth that dirty little piece of paper you clasp so energetically ! "

I spoke somewhat sharply, for I knew Gillett so well as to be convinced that if he once made up his mind that the golden country had an existence, wild horses could not hinder him from its quest, and I had no great fancy to endure the hardships and privations incidental to a wild-goose chase in the interior of South America. Moreover, I thought we had detained the Indian long enough, though he was standing with folded arms like a monument of patience, and looked sufficiently submissive to await our pleasure for hours longer.

Receiving no answer from Gillett, who appeared wrapt in deep thought, I again reminded him that the Indian was still waiting. This produced no effect, for he looked at me with unseeing eyes and immediately recommenced a fresh examination of the paper. After a long interval, his voice returned, and he deigned to give me some few reasons in support of his ridiculous theory.

" This small leaflet, which is part of a diary, cannot possibly be a forgery, for the character of the writing corresponds accurately with that in vogue during the latter half of the seventeenth century, and the ink has faded in so peculiar a manner that I defy any chemist to imitate it. Again, there is a true ring in the unfortunate man's lament over his friend Buttler's death, and in the cruel fate which kept him in captivity at Chalco ; it has a pathos about it utterly unlike the spurious counterfeit of the modern novelist. But my chief proof of the genuineness of the paper is exhibited when I hold it up to the light. See, here fortunately a portion of the wire-mark is preserved,

and this is conclusive of the date at which the paper was manufactured. I clearly discern it to be a man's face crowned with stag's antlers, a device used in Tate's famous mills at Hertford. In addition to this, I can read the letters 'rtf' immediately below the water-mark, and it requires no great effort of the imagination to supply the deficiency and convert the unmeaning letters into 'Hertford.' By these means I am enabled to fix the date of the manufacture of the paper at about A.D. 1650, and its contents were probably written ten or a dozen years later. If I could only get hold of the rest of the diary, I am convinced it would prove that what is written in this little page of a dead man's history is truth—that Chalco is, or was then, an actual reality, overflowing with gold and precious stones. Our tremendous difficulty will be to locate it, yet by careful inquiry amongst the various Indian tribes, we might at last collect sufficient data to warrant our starting on the trail with every prospect of success."

"Then I presume you do not intend to pay a visit to Sussex yet a-while?" I asked satirically. "If this is the case, I shall be happy to deliver personally any commissions with which you may charge me to your parents."

"You would not desert me, Wrenforth?" exclaimed Gillett, astonished out of his fool's paradise. "Think of the gain to Science, and the honour to ourselves if we reach this hitherto unattainable country."

"Come back to the regions of common sense," I answered; "give the nigger his paper, and let him go."

"I could almost commit a murder to retain it in my possession!" said Gillett savagely. "It has fascinated me to such an extent that I will have it, even if its purchase cost me twenty years' income."

I laughed aloud at this expensive development of the doctor's craze, but, at his urgent request, consented to aid him in his attempt to buy it. As the Indian, as well as our two selves, understood Spanish, we were enabled to

explain our wishes. But the Redskin was obdurate, and refused to part with his charm, "charmed we never so wisely." Gillett at last offered him six guns, and enough powder and shot to kill every man, woman, and child in his tribe, should he feel so inclined.

At this magnificent bribe the Indian's eyes glistened, and we felt sure he was on the point of accepting our offer, when he suddenly stepped back a few paces, and drawing from beneath his square mantle of puma skin a dilapidated-looking book, he flourished it in our faces.

"My white father has only a small part of the charm," he exclaimed in his guttural accents. "It is useless to him without the rest which I hold here. It is a talisman which has been in my family for many suns, and its possession makes me the bravest warrior and the swiftest runner of the *Souchi*. I would not sell it for all the guns in Peru, for my courage and strength depend upon my retention of it. Tempt me not, therefore, O pale-faces, but restore the charm and let me go."

Notwithstanding this refusal the Redskin appeared unhappy, and I found some interest in watching the various emotions which flitted over his face as he delivered his final decision. His race have always been noted for stolidity of demeanour, yet in this case, the regret at having to refuse Gillett's splendid offer chased away his gravity and gave him instead a pitiful look of hesitation.

Whilst I was occupied in studying the features of the savage, a sudden exclamation induced me to turn my attention to the doctor, whom I perceived glaring with a strange fixity alternately at the tattered book and the single page in his hand.

"That book shall be mine by fair means or foul!" he muttered.

I was about to animadvert rather strongly upon his insane determination to break more than one of the

ordinances of the Decalogue, when his further action struck me dumb with amazement.

He jumped off his seat in a sudden frenzy of excitement, appeared to foam at the mouth, and commenced to execute such contortions with his legs and arms that I felt convinced he had either gone mad, or was attempting to declare hostilities with the "untutored savage" through the preliminary of a war-dance. I was beginning to be afraid that the passers-by would regard him as an escaped lunatic, but almost immediately discovered that he had put a great deal of method into his madness, for, having concluded his antics right in front of the Indian, who was as astonished as I was at seeing a pale-face behaving so outrageously, broke out with—

"I am the mighty medicine man of the rising sun. To me has the Great Father given power to weave spells and to break them, to bring famine and pestilence over the land of the unjust, and to send health and plenty to the tents of the well-doers. Even now, the mighty Pillan has descended upon me and commanded me to break this spell for evermore, should its owner not listen to the words I am to speak unto him!"

The Indian seemed deeply impressed by the grave, solemn manner which had so rapidly succeeded to Gillett's maniacal convulsions. He stood perfectly motionless and drank in every word of the doctor's pretentious utterances, and when the oration came to an end, submissively said—

"Let my father speak unto me the commands of Pillan, and I, his son, will listen and obey."

"Come then with me," replied Gillett. "For thus saith the Great Father—'The time for the accomplishment of the charm has arrived, and when thou shalt see the possessor of the talisman stricken with exceeding fear, then shalt thou know that it is valueless as a protection unto him, and must pass back to thy race from whom it originally came.' Come then with me, and abide by the decision of

the Great Spirit, who will take thy courage from thee only to give thee still more."

When he finished speaking he turned, still retaining his hold on the truant leaf of the book ; and beckoning to me and the Indian to follow, went off in the direction of our hotel.

I hurried after him, and as I caught him up, asked what magic he was going to practise on the unfortunate savage —whether it would take the form of a few doses of pills, or a slight overdose of strychnine which would enable him to turn his patient out of the hotel prancing like a horse, and stepping out with fine, park-like action ?

"I have not quite thought it out yet," he answered. "But I am convinced that if I cannot prove myself to be a magician of the first order, I shall never get that book. The spirit of covetousness is full on me, and I will move heaven and earth to gratify it. As a means towards this end, I shall call on Dr. Vicuna and borrow his electrical apparatus, and then hurry back to the hotel to complete the preparations for the reception of my thrice-welcome guest. To you I depute the task of bringing him on very leisurely, and whatever you do, don't let him escape you."

With these words he went off at full speed, and was soon lost to sight, whilst I followed slowly with my charge. By this time I had begun to enter into the spirit of the thing, and enjoyed by anticipation the joke which the fertile brains of the doctor was preparing for his superstitious victim. I confess that I also began to feel some anxiety to dip into the antiquated manuscript, and therefore tried the effect of my persuasive powers upon my companion. I offered money enough to keep him liberally supplied with fire-water for over a year, besides a beautiful little revolver which I temptingly held before his eyes—but all to no purpose. I pointed out the uselessness of his talisman, since the great Magician had broken its power ; but he smiled incredulously, muttered, "We shall see," and stalked

on with that lithe but majestic swing so peculiarly the attribute of the American Indians.

After making our walk last at least twenty minutes longer than it ought to have done, I succeeded in getting my savage safely into the hotel, and mounted with him to our suite of rooms, where I thought it advisable to knock before entering.

"Take him into the room over the *plaza*, and when I am ready I will call you," answered Gillett with a smothered laugh.

I accordingly ushered our visitor into the room indicated, where, disdaining a chair, he sat on his haunches and waited stolidly for the manifestation of the white man's prowess in the black art! As for myself, I had the greatest difficulty in keeping my countenance, and conducting myself with an air of seriousness, which I knew to be necessary on so grave an occasion. However, I managed to successfully conceal my tendency to laughter, but felt grateful when I heard the doctor's voice requesting us to walk into the further room, which he had rendered as dark as night.

"O noble Cacique!" began the doctor, as soon as the door was shut, "the great Spirit of the East is about to manifest his will. If the spell of your charm is still unbroken, then you will go hence untouched and unharmed; but if it is gone, then you will experience great trepidation and tremblings of the limbs until you cast the talisman away from you. I have spoken. Now behold the light of the Great Father!"

As he finished speaking a pale blue light burst forth, revealing his position. I nearly stifled myself with suppressing my laughter, as I saw that he had put a night-shirt over his clothes, and was now busily engaged in rubbing luminous paint all over it! He gradually assumed the appearance of being literally covered with fire, and, as he occasionally raised his hands as if supplicating the presence

of some mighty demon, his fingers streamed with an unearthly blaze.

Presently Gillett began to advance out of his corner towards the Indian, who shrank back in terror at the supernatural phenomenon. The doctor had an object in coming forward, and it was to drive his wretched victim on to an iron slab which served as a grate whenever a fire was required. As he passed me, he whispered an admonition to take care that the Redskin kept on the metal until driven off by an occult agency.

Everything fell out as he wished, for our visitor involuntarily took up his quarters in the required position, and seemed too terrified to think of moving. To make thoroughly sure, Gillett exclaimed—

“Stand still and move not, or the Great Spirit, who is now approaching, will rend you.”

I could just discern the Indian’s features as he heard this announcement, and I really pitied him. His struggle to maintain an air of *sang-froid* was desperate, but, do what he would, he could not prevent his limbs from trembling or his teeth from chattering. It seemed too bad to frighten the poor fellow nearly out of his wits merely because Gillett was determined to possess a property to which he had no right; and I believe my sense of fair play would soon have upset the doctor’s calculations had not the *dénouement* come too rapidly for me to act.

A peculiar whizzing sound warned me that the electrical apparatus was now in action, but the Redskin continued to stand his ground manfully; then I heard Gillett mutter—

“He takes it pretty stiff, so here goes for something stiffer.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a yell, loud enough and fiendish enough to startle the whole town, resounded in my ears. Gillett had fully carried out his threat, and the Indian bounded into the air as if shot out of a gun, flinging the book away from him into one corner

of the room, whilst he alighted in another, where he cowered in a most abject state of terror.

"Victory, victory!" shouted the doctor, as he executed a terpsichorean movement remarkable for its ridiculous absurdity, but which the savage no doubt thought was the concluding part of the magical rite.

I now took the victim into daylight, whilst Gillett remained behind to divest himself of his paint. Presently he rejoined us, and the Indian promptly saluted him as a mighty *Machi*¹ whose commands he would henceforth obey. To my annoyance, the doctor then and there struck a bargain with the savage which seemed rather a one-sided arrangement, for the Indian was to give his services to his new master in return for a promise that he would make him rich! I began to expostulate upon the inconvenience of taking a savage to New York or England, and argued that the poor fellow would die if kept away from his wild surroundings for any length of time. To this Gillett's reply was, that he had no immediate intention of visiting either of those places; he rather thought of wintering at Chalco!

"Are you mad?" I angrily asked. "You do not even know whether your El Dorado is in Asia, Africa, America, or the moon. Even assuming that you ever got there, you would find it to consist of a few miserable wigwams, with plenty of dirt and squalor in place of your gold and precious stones."

"I will fully discuss the question when I have dismissed my man and have read through the precious diary," answered Gillett with his habitual coolness. "At present I believe that I have won a huge fortune in the cheapest possible manner, namely, by the expenditure of a little luminous paint, aided by the persuasive force of a twenty-cell battery."

I was too angry to say any more, so I left him and his

¹ Medicine man, or magician.

Indian abruptly. I could hardly conceive it possible that a man of his age, education, and common sense could go so stark staring mad upon a fallacy that had been exploded long before he was born. *El Dorado* forsooth! Notwithstanding its jingle of gold, the word had hitherto been synonymous with misery and death, and so it seemed likely to continue to be, until civilization should spread over the vast tracts of pampas and deserts watered by the Orinoco, and demonstrate the whole thing to be a chimera invented by brains more gifted with greed than sense.

I dined that evening at the *table d'hôte*, and noticed that Gillett did not put in an appearance. No doubt he was too interested over his new-found treasure to trouble himself about eating; but as I had no particular craze on just then to destroy my appetite, I made a hearty meal, and then passed the next two hours in smoking, dozing, and watching the fireflies. About ten o'clock Gillett stood before me, pale and outwardly calm, but inwardly full of excitement.

"If ever you possessed a love for antiquity or discovery, now is the time to show it," he said very quietly. "I have read, weighed, and considered every word in the Indian's diary, and am thoroughly convinced of the existence of a civilized race in the interior of this continent. I will not attempt to persuade you to alter your plans by any specious argument; all I ask you to do is to read for yourself, and I feel sure you will come round to my way of thinking."

"And if I do not?" I inquired.

"Then Chotil and I will make the expedition together."

"Well, all I can do is to promise to read the diary carefully," was my reply.

"If you do that," answered the doctor cheerfully, "you will countermand the cabins we have taken in to-morrow's steamer."

CHAPTER III.

A CRY FROM A VANISHED AGE.

ALTHOUGH I could not help being annoyed with Gillett at his threatened desertion for such a will-o'-the-wisp chase as that of El Dorado, yet I own to having experienced a considerable amount of curiosity to see the contents of the diary, and I therefore eagerly followed my friend to the sitting-room, and begged him to read the manuscript aloud. He instantly consented, and for three hours unflaggingly occupied himself with the task. So great was his desire to enlist my sympathies and gain my adhesion to the project he had already formed, that he unconsciously rendered the reading the most pathetic I had ever listened to.

I shall now proceed to give some extracts from the journal which was written by Hugh Desmonde with the double object of communicating with the outer world and of whiling away the time of his enforced stay at Chalco.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF HUGH DESMONDE.

Commenced March 31st, 1664.

Of a surety, this lovely city is a house of bondage! Though free to walk whithersoever I will, yet I cannot escape over the marshes and clasp a fellow-countryman by the hand ere I die. I deem it to be wisdom to write a book wherein I shall record the adventures and sufferings of myself and my poor friend Buttler, who, alas, is now no

more. And the wisdom consists in this—that I shall commit the writing, when completed, to the hands of a Cacique who has permission to enter the city. I shall bestow it upon him as a precious amulet which he may show to all but never part with except to a white man, and in this fashion I trust it may meet the eye of the well-disposed and induce them to fit out an expedition for my deliverance.

I am luxuriously housed and am fed with dainties such as the king himself eats ; I am treated as something more than mortal, and all men prostrate themselves before me. The reason that I am treated thus sumptuously is to be sought for in the fact that I am the first white man the Atlicaligui have ever seen. Many thousand suns ago, says their tradition, a white man taught them the arts and sciences, and after a lengthy stay took his departure to the far East, to the land of the rising sun, after promising to return again. From that time until my advent, the people had been expecting the reappearance of the great white god who would bring with him the harmonious delights of a golden age. The sudden arrival of two Englishmen, weakened though we were with fever, worked the religious fervour of the people of Chalco up to the verge of frenzy, for they imagined that they perceived in us the same attributes that pertained to the strange white being who had dwelt amongst them so long ago. By reason of my being of greater stature, I was singled out for divine honours, whilst to Buttler was assigned the position of attendant spirit. The situation was very irksome, and we would willingly have escaped from it had we known how ; indeed our divinity was placed beyond all doubt in the minds of this simple people by a circumstance which was exceedingly trivial.

Whilst we were in the irritable condition of convalescence from fever, we were constantly annoyed by the curiosity of the inhabitants, who, at all hours of the day and night,

assembled in huge crowds and crawled on all fours past us, touching our garments as they went. This at last became such a nuisance that we determined to punish them for their want of politeness. We therefore loaded our pistolets with powder only, and discharged them in the air. The effect was greater than we imagined possible, for groans, lamentations, and shouts of "The gods are angry" rent the air as the terrified multitude rushed pell-mell from our sight. Presently, a deputation of priests waited upon us, praying that we would not consume the people with our thunder, fire, and smoke. When we had reassured the trembling suppliants, they manifested their gratitude by a huge sacrifice, the smoke of which clung to my nostrils for many days after. But this incident had the result of increasing the number of our worshippers, who were so fearful of losing our protection and favour, that we could not move out of our houses without being accompanied by a numerous bodyguard. Hence, virtually, we were prisoners !

Both Buttler and myself are the younger sons of good families in the county of Devon, and being imbued with the love of excitement, thought it no disgrace to turn our attention to trading with the Don Spaniard. Adventure in plenty was to be had in the Spanish main, and ducats innumerable were to be earned there also, so we shipped our cargo, sailed with a favourable wind from Cartagena, and arrived safely at Buenos Ayres on February 12th, 1661. Here we disposed of our merchandise, and realized so large a profit that we bethought ourselves of enjoying a holiday by working our way to Lima by the route of the Pampas and the Cordilleras de los Andes.

It was an evil day for us when we made up our minds to stay on shore, for the bigoted Spaniard and Creole conceived we had no right to remain after we had disposed of our business. Very shortly, our appearance in the streets was sufficient excuse for the people to cast at us the epithet

of "Jew," for they, in their ignorance, divided humanity into three classes—the *Chapetones*, who were pure Spaniards; the Creoles, those born in America; and the Jews, in which category were included all foreigners and heretics.

With a great deal of trouble we gained permission to join ourselves to a party of merchants who were about to convey their goods from the sea-coast to Potosi, but when we were on the point of starting, Alvaredo, a magistrate of Potosi, declared his displeasure at being forced to travel in company with heretics. Buttler, whose impetuous disposition had often brought him into trouble, told the magistrate that he was under no compulsion to journey with us, and that if he feared contamination he had better remain behind. The fiery Spaniard resented this language, and a duel, in which Alvaredo was slightly wounded, was the result. It would have been far better for us if Buttler had killed his opponent outright; but as it was, the Spaniard journeyed with us and pretended to bear no malice, and even thrust himself upon our society. We neither of us perceived his cunning malignity in drawing us on daily to dispute with him about various points of theology in order to embroil us with that offspring of Satan, the Inquisition, which was now in the full zenith of its power throughout South America.

Four days after our arrival at Potosi, and on the eve of our departure for Lima, we were arrested by the familiars of the Inquisition, and lodged in one of the gloomy vaults of the Holy Office situated under the public square. This happened on June 12th, 1661, but it was not until the following November that we were informed of the charges against us.

(The diary enumerates forty-four distinct acts of blasphemy and heresy brought against Desmonde and Buttler, every one of which is so puerile and trivial, as to raise a smile of derision against men filled with such fanatical ignorance.) I could hardly believe my senses when I heard

that one of the principal accusations was, that we had repeatedly asserted that no good Christian ought to *fear* God. I maintained then what I maintain now, that the fear of God does not imply the idea of terror, and I could hardly imagine that so self-evident an explanation involved a matter of life and death.

I began to believe, in face of such a trivial case against us, that the Don was merely actuated by spite against Englishmen in general in keeping us so long in prison. I know that they execrated the very name of sailors who had so often forced their mighty galleons to strike their flag to that of England, or had driven them to take refuge beneath the batteries of their seaports. Buttler's opinion differed from mine. He fancied that the Holy Office was as much a political as a religious engine, and that its directors were not averse to allowing its machinery to be made use of by rich and influential persons, such as our enemy Alvaredo, in the furtherance of private vengeance.

Although we were kept close prisoners all these weary months, we hadn't much to complain of in the treatment we received at the hands of our gaolers. The food was plenteous, though coarse, and tobacco was not forbidden. We were, in fact, considerably surprised at the leniency displayed towards us, for we had been taught from our infancy to look upon a Spaniard as a veritable incarnation of cruelty. This feeling was probably inherited from our grandfathers who fought and defeated the "invincible" Armada, and discovered in many of the captured ships various instruments of torture, such as thumb-screws and racks. The indignation which the sight of these horrible things aroused can be easily imagined, and many a prayer of heartfelt gratitude, mingled with terrible execrations against cruelty, were uttered for England's miraculous deliverance from so fiendish a foe!

Both Buttler and I were of opinion that a cell in the Inquisition at Potosi was very much more comfortable than

an English gaol, for here we were not crowded up with other prisoners, and moreover one or two of the Fathers would occasionally visit us, bringing with them a little strong water as a present ; they would frequently stay an hour or two and pass the time in pleasant conversation which sometimes turned upon the subject of our alleged acts of blasphemy. We found out afterwards that these gentlemen with their kind sympathetic manners simply visited us in the character of spies !

On the morning of March 12th, 1662, we were suddenly ordered to appear in court and stand our trial.

After four days spent in wrangling with the judges, we were remanded for another month, and recommended to the paternal care of Father Iriarte, a man with the suavity of an angel and a heart like a tiger's. This villain set about his work by endeavouring to make us sign a recantation, but as this would be tantamount to acknowledging ourselves guilty, we wisely declined having anything to do with it. Enraged with his ill-success, the Holy Father threatened us with the torture, and in order to give us an inkling of what it was like, condemned us to witness its application to three poor wretches who were accused of being wizards, with about as much justice as we were of being heretics and Jews !

We were conducted by winding steps to a subterranean chamber dimly lighted by a few candles, and scarcely had we caught sight of the inquisitors, the executioners, and the ghastly paraphernalia of torture than we both shuddered with horror, for the whole aspect of the place, even its very atmosphere, seemed impregnated with curses and groans wrung from human souls by unutterable torments.

The Inquisition made use of three kinds of torture, that of the cord, the water, and the fire. We were forced to witness all three, each of them occupying an hour to complete. I will not harrow the feelings of those into whose hands this diary may fall, by entering into any

details of the agony I was compelled to look at. The first victim was an unfortunate Indian who having fallen in love with Christianity had been baptized. For reasons not difficult to find, he had, within a year of his conversion, abjured his new faith, and relapsed into the idolatry of his fathers. His persecutors had assigned him the torture of the cord in expiation of his crime. The two other victims were well-to-do Spaniards who were condemned as blasphemers, but whose real sin probably consisted in being too amply supplied with the riches of this world!

Both Buttler and myself were conducted back to our cell in an almost fainting condition. If the mere witnessing of these horrible agonies could produce such an effect, what must the actual suffering have been? It seemed to me that on that day a veil had been lifted, and had exposed to my gaze the demoniacal side of man's nature thoroughly triumphant over his Divine essence. That Christ-like sympathy, which relieved the bodily and mental anguish of even the greatest sinners, was utterly extinct in the hearts of the Holy Fathers, who, in the name of God, refused pity to those who required it most. Never, to my dying day, shall I be able to efface this awful scene. Yet I have learned a lesson from it, which is to always extend sympathy and pity to any of God's creatures who need it. Man is but a miserable being even at his best, never certain of holding the truth, and only capable of striving after it; hence it is altogether out of his province to destroy his fellow-men for not thinking exactly as he does.

Under the impression that the horror which overpowered us would render us more pliable in contributing to our doom by acknowledging the truth of the charges against us, we were the next day brought again before the judges. But they had not reckoned upon our English obstinacy, for, as on former occasions, we continued to deny their jurisdiction, and boldly asserted that they only sought to condemn us at

the secret instigation of our enemy, Alvaredo. Perhaps we were guilty of over-boldness, for our speech inflamed the minds of the Holy Fathers, who with angry looks overruled our objections and found us guilty upon seventeen counts out of the forty-four! Fear of the heretical English was extinguished by their anger, and they condemned us to be burnt alive at a grand "*Auto de fé*" which would be given in honour of the new Governor-General, who was expected to arrive in Lima at the beginning of June!

When we regained our dungeon, we laughed heartily over the fanatical ignorance of our judges; but, after a time, we ceased to laugh and began seriously to consider our position, which we concluded to be hopeless, as we knew that any appeal for mercy would be in vain. We had now about seven weeks of life left to us, and then we should make our exit as human torches for the illumination of the Plaza Mayor of Lima!

It was almost maddening to think that our lives were to be cut short through the ignorance and malice of a pack of half-breeds. Malice, in the shape of Alvaredo, ordered our arrest; and Ignorance, under the guise of religion, determined to convert a farce into a hideous tragedy!

I cannot refrain from stating that one of the chief counts upon which we were sentenced was that of being Jews! As the Holy Inquisition claimed authority over Jews as well as infidels, our judges evidently imagined that, in default of any other sufficient reason, they could safely convict us upon the very broad ground of having done a few things which the Hebrews were accustomed to do. If any of my fellow-countrymen should be curious enough to wish to know the indications of Judaism for which we were deemed unworthy to live, I here write down for their information the four fatal acts to which we were, for truth's sake, compelled to plead guilty.

1. To having put on clean clothes on Saturday!

2. To having removed the fat from the meat which we were about to eat !

3. To having repeated the Psalms without adding the *Gloria Patri* !

4. To having examined a knife to see whether it was notched before killing an animal !¹

These four acts were deemed proof conclusive of our having lapsed from an heretical form of Christianity to the abominable errors of Judaism ! Can any freeborn Englishman blame me if, in my despair, I cursed the insane bigotry of Torquemada, whose mad zeal caused him to institute one of the most infernal systems for degrading humanity ? If in the world towards which I was hastening, I could but have the power of judging between the Grand Inquisitor and the Emperor Nero, I should deem the latter to be lamb-like in comparison to the tigerish propensities of his Christian emulator.

That arch-hypocrite, Father Iriarte, the man with a honied tongue and a devil's heart, once undertook to prove to me that the Inquisition was of Divine origin, and that the first Inquisitor was God Himself. This was the gist of his argument : When our first parents had committed sin by eating the forbidden fruit, the Deity cited Adam—“ *Adam, ubi es ?* ” Our forefather presented himself, and God began His interrogations, judging the criminal by Himself and in secret. Adam, being found guilty, was driven from Paradise, suffering thereby the loss of his former property. Upon this the Inquisition founded their title for confiscating the goods of heretics ; but not content with acting upon the authority of God, Torquemada and Company seemed to think it necessary to strengthen their claim by an appeal to the *heathen* philosopher Plato, from whom they quote the following—“ Without virtue, the things of the earth are pernicious to their possessors, being

¹ From Marchena, in his additions to the *Compendium of Eymerico*.

an incitement to their passions, and an instrument for their crimes.”¹

The recollection of many pleasant conversations with the Holy Fathers—made pleasant to conceal their diabolical intent—was bitterness to me, for I now knew that I had been made to say many foolish things in the heat of an argument which I ought to have left unsaid. But, after all, I do not think it mattered much, for our condemnation was no doubt settled before we underwent the mockery of a trial, and the Protestant theories I uttered only served to give the judges some colour of an excuse for their disgraceful action. Anyhow, they were determined to have a respectable *Auto de fé* in honour of the incoming Governor, so they condemned Buttler and myself, together with seven others, to help forward the universal illuminations.

In mentioning the agonies which Father Iriarte had forced us to witness in the torture-chamber of the Holy Office, I alluded to an Indian who, having been captivated by the sublime theory of Christian love, had forsaken his false gods and embraced the true Faith. His residence after conversion amongst the pale-faces revealed such an utter want of the Divine charity he had been led to expect, and showed such open cruelty and lust, that he became disenchanted, returned to the worship of the great spirit Manito, and cursed the God of the Christians for a devil! Unfortunately for himself, he fell into the clutches of the Inquisition, and after undergoing the torture, was condemned to be burned alive with us at Lima.

Some days after we had received our sentence, this Indian was thrust into our dungeon, which had hitherto been untenanted save by Buttler and myself; and the gaoler, in answer to our indignant inquiries, informed us that the savage was to suffer along with us, and that his orders were to keep us three heretics together, being incorrigible

¹ Luis de Paramo, cited by Bermudez in his work, *De Origine et Progressu Officii Sanct. Inquisitionis*.

and without any redeeming points, until the day of execution.

Woe-begone, hopeless sinners as we were, and within a few weeks of meeting the Creator of us all, we yet resented the indignity put upon us by the intrusion of the Redskin. For some days we left him to himself, and he, poor fellow, submissively acknowledged our superiority! He sat in a corner as far removed from us as possible, occasionally muttering a sentence which became so wearisome by iteration that I impatiently asked him what he meant.

"Knife, knife!" he said in broken Spanish. "Stone soft—escape."

Pride of birth, pride of race, pride of colour, vanished like magic at the sound of these life-giving words. This son of the forest, panting to be free and yearning to be roving over his vast pampas, had instilled hope into two despairing men, and these men forgot all their aforesaid pride and welcomed him as a brother. Verily it requires some great misfortune, some terrible shock, to make men think as God wishes them—to make them cease to undervalue a single human soul, whether it be cased in a white, a red, or a black body.

Our gaoler, who was a good sort of man for a Spaniard, having within him a certain amount of genuine compassion, was prevailed upon to allow us a knife to carve an image of the Virgin. He made us swear solemnly not to attempt to commit suicide, and the hearty manner in which we took the oath thoroughly convinced him of our sincerity.

We received the precious weapon with an intense though carefully suppressed excitement, and directly the gaoler had turned his back, our Indian broke the knife in two, his object being to have a tool in reserve should we be deprived of the other. The broken blade, fitted into a handle, proved most useful, and we lost no time in commencing operations on the soft stone. As the cell was always wrapped in deep gloom, we were enabled to excavate

without much fear of our design being discovered. The fine dust, which was the product of our labours, was spread carefully over the floor, and a miserable seat with ragged garments arranged over it, effectually hid our tunnel from the careless glance of the warder.

We worked steadily for eighteen days, and our joy as the hole became larger was almost frantic. Yet the fear of discovery, perhaps at the very moment of success, often reduced us to the deepest despondency, so that from overwhelming gladness we would suddenly sink into the blackest despair. The Indian was above these constant variations of emotion. Perhaps he was a fatalist, but whatever his secret thoughts or fears may have been, he outwardly maintained a calm stolidity, which helped to reassure us when our hopes had sunk to the lowest ebb.

On the nineteenth day we pierced through the wall, and made an opening sufficiently large for the Indian to creep through. We awaited his return in profound silence, for upon his report our safety depended. At last he came back with the dismal news that we had only burrowed from one dungeon to another. We hung our heads in deep despair; then Buttler, who had made up his mind that escape was possible, urged us to set to work vigorously to enlarge the hole so that he might pass through. Willing arms soon made the breach practicable, and we watched him disappear with a fervent prayer that he might bring back good tidings.

After half an hour's anxious expectancy, we were rejoiced to hear his voice; and in another minute he had dragged himself through the opening, and was telling us his belief that the other dungeon was immediately under the pavement of the Plaza, and that at dead of night we might be able to raise one of the stones which alone stood between us and liberty.

During the hour that intervened between this and the gaoler's visit we worked away heartily, I making the hole

big enough for myself to get through, the other two endeavouring to loosen the cement which fastened the pavement-stone. Mounted by turns on one another's shoulders, we plied the two inches of steel now remaining to us as the relic of our knife, with such determination that we felt sure a vigorous heave would dislodge the sole intervening barrier between the accursed cells of the Inquisition and freedom.

At nine o'clock in the evening our custodian paid his final visit, and after telling us that the order had arrived for our removal to Lima in four days' time, wished us good night, and retired. We breathed a deep sigh of relief as the echoes of his footsteps died away along the stone corridor, for the thought occurred simultaneously to us all that our work had not been accomplished too soon.

The Indian now went through the tunnel, and listened with anxious ears to the sounds of life in the Plaza above him. Gradually they ceased as the hours sped on, and at one o'clock we looked around our gloomy habitation for the last time. Swiftly we traversed the excavation, and stood underneath the stone, which merely required a powerful push to make us free men. Buttler and the Indian mounted on my shoulders, stooped, and then, by a sudden straightening of their backs, sent the obstacle flying aside. At that instant, the glorious blue of heaven, studded with its myriads of golden stars, burst upon our longing eyes. The ecstasy of that moment is indelibly imprinted on my mind ! The heavens seemed so near, so resplendent with brilliancy, that I breathed a fervent prayer of thankfulness to the Creator for His mercy to us poor captives.

* * * * *

A long account of their hairbreadth escape down the Cirro de Potosi, and their subsequent wanderings, now occupies many pages of the diary. For a long time they seem to have subsisted upon ground-nuts, varied occasionally by some game shot with bows and arrows manu-

factured in a rude fashion, the string of the bow being supplied by thin strips of the skin of an animal they were fortunate enough to knock down with a stone. From the time they became possessed of these arms they seem to have got on better, and their position was still further improved by an accidental meeting with some Spanish hunters, who supplied them with a pistol apiece, together with powder and shot. For quite a year they wandered about the trackless American forest, in the vain hope of reaching a settlement where the Inquisition had not reared its head, and the journal somewhat minutely records the hardships and privations they suffered during this time. From May 1663, the diary again becomes interesting, from its indicating the route followed in nearing the city of Chalco. I shall content myself with giving a few extracts.

* * * * *

May 1st.—The villagers are dancing round many a gaily-decked Maypole this day in England, whilst Buttler and I are watching our noble and faithful Nipoko (the Indian) draw his last breath. What a difference is there between the happy crowds on the village-green and our miserable forlorn selves, with Death stepping in to separate us from a dear friend, Redskin though he be!

May 5th.—We have wandered, after burying our friend, in an aimless manner away from the banks of the river, and seem to be getting deeper and deeper into a trackless mire overgrown with the most luxurious vegetation conceivable. Ever since we escaped from Potosi we had been moving steadily northward, in what now seems the vain hope of reaching the English settlement of Surinam, which our countrymen had founded some thirty years ago.¹ This was the only place on the whole of this vast continent where we felt sure of an asylum, and a hearty, honest welcome. I had reckoned the distance we had to traverse

¹ This settlement was ceded to the Dutch in 1667.

to be about fourteen hundred miles up to the equator, and thence another five hundred miles to the north of the Berbice river. After a year's hard toil we had not accomplished half our task, and the reason for this was that a compass given us by the Spanish hunters led us north-eastwards instead of due north. The error was not discovered until we had been travelling for more than three months, and then we endeavoured to steer by the stars; but so difficult were the night marches that we were forced to discontinue them, and trust to the sun to guide us. As this unfortunate deviation from our original plan turned us to the so-called El Dorado, I have subjoined a map in which latitude and longitude are calculated as correctly as possible, in the faint hope that it may induce some bold adventurer to set forth to my rescue. Should any one care to brave the perils of the forests and the swamps, he would be amply rewarded for his toil by suddenly coming amongst a people whose civilization, if antique, is magnificent, and whose buildings afford me a never-ending source of admiration.

May 12th.—We are still involved in a tangled mass of giant creepers, festooned from tree to tree, and forming a carpet of many hues of green on the moist, yielding soil beneath our feet. Under happier circumstances, I should have revelled in the magnificent foliage which enveloped us, and should have gone wild with delight at the profuse verdure with which nature had so richly adorned this lovely region of earth. But we had no cause for rejoicing as we began to realize that we were lost in a tropical forest whose richness of vegetation resulted from vast accumulations of decaying vegetable matter, the exhalations from which were laden with fever and death. How forcibly I learned then, as well as subsequently, to distrust nature when she seemed to be clothed in her brightest and most alluring garb! Whilst my senses were intoxicated with the delight of her charms, she, like a sorceress, stole away

my strength and prostrated me with her unseen wiles—fever-laden, death-dealing !

Buttler fared no better, and, like two spectres, we crawled wearily through the swamp in search of food, every now and then entreating God to put an end to our sufferings, for they were more than could be borne. But just as exhausted nature was about to give up the struggle, we found ourselves upon the banks of a river, on the other side of which the ground rose abruptly up into tall hills. Could we but reach this elevated plateau, we might yet throw off our shivering fits of ague, but our feebleness was so intense that we agreed to defer the attempt to swim across until the next morning.

May 13th.—We had just made up our minds to cross the river, and in anticipation of one or both of us being drowned, had taken an affectionate farewell, when we saw a canoe skimming the rapid current, propelled by an Indian, whose face looked decidedly lighter than the generality of his brethren. He might even be a Spaniard, and as we dreaded falling again into the hands of the Don, we shrank back behind some bushes and hesitated to hail him. But we were so nearly at death's door that we cast aside all caution, and in another instant were hallooing as loudly as our feeble voices would permit. We were heard, and the Indian promptly paddled towards us, but the moment he caught sight of our pale faces he threw himself out of the canoe, prostrated himself, and acted as if he were in the presence of a divine phenomenon. Emboldened by these signs of abject terror, we stepped into the boat, and pointing to the opposite shore, motioned him to paddle across. As soon as we got safely to the other side, our Charon again prostrated himself, and then, without a word, ran off as fast as his legs would carry him. Whilst wondering what this sudden desertion might portend, we stretched ourselves on the bank and went to sleep.

In about half an hour we were awoke by the sound of

numerous voices, and we saw a huge multitude of men and women coming down the hill towards us, headed by our late boatman. We soon ascertained that their intentions were far from hostile, for they one and all grovelled before us as if we were gods! Then there approached from out of the crowd, a superb sedan-chair overlaid with gold and sparkling with diamonds and rubies, and from it stepped a splendid-looking man, clad in a loose flowing robe, with golden breastplate and sandals. He, too, though evidently of high rank, made a most reverent obeisance, and, pointing to his conveyance, seemed to intimate a wish that we should make use of it. We accordingly placed ourselves inside, and accompanied by thousands of natives, made our triumphal entry into Chalco.

Ye cities of Europe, bow your heads with ignominy, for ye cannot compare with the paradise of Chalco with its flash of gold and glitter of gems. As we passed through the golden gates, our eyes were dazzled with the rays of the sun reflected from doors and roofs made of the precious metal. Our hearts rose within us as we realized that we had entered the portals of El Dorado, and had alighted upon a city which seemed a very Capua for luxury.

May 13th, 1664.—This is the first anniversary of our entry into Chalco, but twelve months of pomp and circumstance have not reconciled me to my lot. I have grown sad and gray before my time, and have turned my thoughts from things temporal to things eternal. Poor Buttler's death has much to do with this, for with his departure the last link which bound me to earth gave way with a mighty snap. What would I not give for one short hour in my beloved Devon, or even for one glimpse of an honest English face! To me, they would be worth all the wealth with which I am surrounded, and to gain such a blessing I would gladly consent to become a poverty-stricken beggar, liable to be whipped at the cart's tail. But a something

within me whispers that escape is impossible, and that I must resign myself to live out my life amongst this extraordinary people. To-morrow the Cacique comes for this book, which is to be a charm that will endow him with courage and swiftness, and which may, under God's Providence, be a means of deliverance for an unhappy exile. To-morrow, also, I am to wed a bride chosen for me from the royal tribe. She is beautiful and modest, and endowed with those quaint graces of manner which seem to belong to an epoch coeval with Solomon. Perhaps she may attach me once more to this life, and if she does so I shall bless her and cease to fret my heart out in unavailing sorrow.

Here I must end, for the hour of sacrifice is at hand, and I must show myself to my worshippers. As a loyal Englishman, I wish my beloved country farewell, and I pray that God may long save our gallant King Charles, so mercifully restored to rule over his loving subjects. To my dear father and my sweet sisters, farewell—a long farewell till we all meet together in eternity.

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When Gillett came to the end of the reading, he closed the book gently, and laid it on the table. As for me, I sat silent with moistened eyes, for I could have no doubt that this unfortunate Desmonde, who loved his country so dearly, never succeeded in finding his way back. I, who had no relatives, could perhaps sympathize more strongly with a man who was cut off from all chance of ever meeting them again, because I had often keenly felt the want of true affection, and could vividly imagine how sweet and tender a thing it was, and, consequently, how awful its severance must be. From this reverie Gillett's voice aroused me.

"Now that you have heard the story from beginning to end, and have inspected the rough map of the country, do you still disbelieve in El Dorado?"

"No," I replied promptly. "It exists as surely as does this city!"

"Then what do you propose to do?" inquired the doctor anxiously.

"Go there!" was my brief but emphatic reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASS OF THEGTHEG.

AN intense excitement, a boundless enthusiasm usurped the place of my previous scepticism. To succeed where the adventurous Spaniard and the brave Raleigh had miserably failed, would be the acme of good fortune—the climax of my fondest hopes. So ardent had I become that Gillett's caution, in delaying our immediate departure so that he might hunt up fresh evidence, put me into a state of feverish impatience. But I only got laughed at by the cool doctor, who averred that I was a most perfect convert, as I was animated with an intense bigotry in my new belief! However, I soon found out that, with all the zeal in the world, it took time to collect together everything needful for an expedition which might be extended to an indefinite period. Guns, ammunition, provisions of all sorts, and a plentiful supply of quinine had to be bought, a train of mules had to be obtained, and our Souchi Indian had to go to his country to recruit twenty of his men for our service. All Gillett's endeavours to hunt up any further clues to El Dorado proved futile, but Chotil, our Indian, was able to tell us of a tradition which still lingered in his tribe concerning it. According to his computation, Desmonde's diary had been in the possession of his family for about one hundred and twenty years, and it had been obtained by an ancestor from a magician of a race called Atlagi, who gave it as a potent

spell for preserving the strength and fleetness of its owner. I fancied I could detect a similarity in name between these Atlagi and the Atlicaligui mentioned in the journal, but when I questioned Chotil as to their habitat, he said that it was unknown; tradition reported that they lived in a country surrounded on all sides by rivers which spread out into marshes so vast and so fever-stricken as to render impossible any attempt to penetrate thither; as far as he knew, no living being had ever obtained access to the mysterious region, or had ever left it; some of the old men of his tribe remembered hearing in their youth that the Atlagi were demi-gods who lived in golden palaces, and guarded their territory by the agency of spirits whose flaming swords killed any intruder who attempted to cross the marshes.

"I consider Chotil's account to be good, solid evidence," I remarked to Gillett, after I had extracted all the information possible. "We know that the antiquity of the paper on which the diary is written is beyond all question, and we now are assured that no white man has held it for at least one hundred and twenty years—if the Indian had said two hundred years, he would probably be nearer the mark. Then, again, the almost identical names given to the El Doradians by Desmonde and Chotil, and the similarity in their description of the swamps which hem in the country, furnish almost certain proofs that we are not about to start off on a wild-goose chase."

"Thou hast spoken with wisdom," replied the doctor. "It is now my turn, and I will direct my discourse towards solving the mystery of those terrible guardian spirits armed with swords of flame. It is a pity to destroy the illusions of such a pretty fable, for it reminds me of those angels of fire who were appointed to prevent the return of Adam and Eve to the garden of Eden after they had been driven out. But modern science is inexorable, so behold these supernatural beings resolved in fevers, and their fiery

swords transformed into incandescent marsh gas—or, as the chemists call it, light carburetted hydrogen or methyl hydride—a gas produced by the decomposition of organic matter in stagnant pools. This is the true will-o'-the-wisp, and though it terrifies the ignorant savage into all sorts of superstitious fears, it can only create alarm in an educated man's mind by the knowledge that where it dances so blithely, there lurk the deadly fever and the ague."

"Do you mean me to apply your scientific explanation to the angels who stood before Eden, as well as to the El Doradian spirits?" I asked.

"No, no," answered Gillett seriously. "I reverence Holy Writ too much to be guilty of adding one jot or abstracting one tittle from it, and it is ever my aim to have nothing to do with attempting to explain any of God's acts or miracles through the medium of a material science which must be faulty even in its greatest perfection. The Cherubim who were ordered to prevent man's re-entry into Paradise were realities who were obeying God's command; but the spirits of Chalco are fictions of man's ignorant brain, which is ever too ready to overlay a natural phenomenon with a ridiculous superstition. These latter I attack by tearing off the envelope of the supernatural and exhibiting them as mere products of earth."

"Then you fear only one thing during our passage over these swamps, and that is malarial fever?"

"Exactly," replied the doctor. "But by careful avoidance of over-fatigue, and by repeated doses of quinine, I have every hope of bringing our party through safely."

As our preparations approached completion, I studied every available map, including the rough sketch in Desmonde's diary, with the determination of fixing even the minutest point permanently in my brain. I was thunderstruck as I gradually found out that we had a vast amount of unexplored country to traverse, and I was more than disappointed at being unable to find several rivers in

the most recent charts, which nevertheless were marked most distinctly in Desmonde's. I also ascertained another fact, which, though of minor importance, magnified itself to my impatient mind. It was that the usual road across the Andes deviated considerably from the straight line conducting to Chalco; and as my anxiety to shorten the journey—even by a day—had risen to fever-pitch, I endeavoured to persuade the doctor and Chotil that we ought to travel by a little-used pass which existed to the north of the ordinary route.

Chotil looked grave as I mentioned this, and after some hesitation flatly refused to attempt such a dangerous road unless the white Machi—meaning Gillett—peremptorily ordered it.

Ever since the episode of the luminous paint and the electric shock, Chotil had regarded the doctor as a super-human being, whose slightest word was law, and I therefore felt that if I wished to carry my point, I should have to stimulate Gillett's enthusiasm up to the same level as my own. But where I had become fanatical, the doctor remained cool and collected.

"It is quite proper," he said, in a tone which savoured of admonition, "to throw your whole heart and soul into any work you may undertake, but it is a foolish thing to let your zeal outrun your discretion. Your proposition that we should cross the Andes by a direct route would commend itself heartily to me, were it not a well-established fact that the shortest road very often turns out to be the longest. We know the dangers of the well-beaten track are infinitesimal, whereas the perils of the one you propose may be prodigious. If an experienced mountaineer like Chotil begs me not to insist upon his guiding us through it, it seems to me that he must have some very good reason for his decided objection."

"What are your real objections?" I asked, turning to the Indian.

"The track is narrow and broken, the precipices awful, and the chasms fathomless," answered Chotil.

"According to your own statement, you have traversed this pass at least six times," I replied. "Why then should a brave man like you hesitate to encounter these difficulties a seventh time? The Souchi are noted for their courage, and they say that Chotil is the most fearless of them all. Would they continue to say this, if they heard that their chief refused to go where the white man led?"

I intended this to be a little piece of judicious flattery which might help to break down his extraordinary repugnance to do as I wished him. It had some effect in the desired direction, for he drew himself up proudly, and answered—

"Chotil does not fear death, nor the swords and arrows of his enemy. He is brave, and the happy hunting-grounds will receive him when his life is finished. But dare he fight against Pillan or tread the sacred ground of Thegtheg, when the Great Spirit has warned him to go there no more?¹ Yet if he goes your way, this he will have to do."

"Ah!" ejaculated Gillett, who had been attentively listening to the conversation. "This puts a different complexion on the case. I thought we were dealing with well-nigh insuperable physical dangers, but it seems we are only befooled by an Indian's superstition."

"It is your duty as a man of science to combat his ignorant fears," I said slyly. "And the best way of doing it is to command him to lead the way over his dreaded Thegtheg."

"Two for yourself and one for the Indian!" answered the doctor laughing. Then, turning to Chotil, he continued,

¹ The Araucanian Indians believe in a deity whom they call Pillan. They also have a tradition of a deluge from which a few people were saved by being deposited on the summit of Thegtheg or the "thundering mountain."

"What makes you imagine that your god inhabits this special piece of mountain any more than any other place, and why do you believe that he has forbidden you to set foot upon it?"

"Listen!" replied Chotil, in a grave and awestruck voice. "Scarcely more than a *cuyen* (a moon or month) has elapsed since I journeyed through this pass, as it very much lessened the distance I had to traverse. With me were five of my tribe laden with skins which we intended to sell in Lima. Late one evening we arrived at a point half-way up a mountain which I have since called Thegtheg, for it assuredly is a sacred spot and a dwelling-place of Pillan. It was nearly dark, and all of us were worn out with fatigue and cold when we stopped to encamp for the night. After swallowing a hastily-cooked meal, we wrapped ourselves in the blankets, and all, except myself, were soon asleep with a feeling of perfect security, for no sentinels are necessary in this lonely and elevated region. Tired as I was, sleep refused to come to me, and I lay awake watching the heavens grow darker and darker, and feeling the frost becoming keener and keener. Whilst I was shivering and tossing restlessly about, the ground began suddenly to tremble beneath me, but being well accustomed to earthquake shocks, I paid no great heed to it, being sure that it would pass away in a few seconds. However, as the trembling continued to be prolonged far beyond its usual limits, I at last began to be alarmed, and was on the point of awakening my companions so that we might make for a place of greater safety, when my eyes rested on a sight which struck me dumb with terror. Yes, Chotil was afraid! He who has never yet turned his back to a foe, fell to the ground in a speechless agony of fear! The huge mountain across the chasm, which had hitherto cast a black shadow over us, suddenly became luminous with a pale blue glare such as the Machi Gillett was wrapped in when he performed his incantations. In the midst of this pale blue

light, a gigantic shadowy form began to shape itself, and whilst I was trembling with fear, it projected an enormous arm towards me and raised its fingers as if warning me away from a sacred spot. Barely had my terrified sight time to notice this, when a loud clap of thunder almost deafened me, and immediately the mountain side appeared to burst open, and a vast scorching flame issued forth, travelling towards us with immense rapidity, as if bent on burning us up for our impiety in trespassing upon the domain of mighty Pillan. I became senseless, and on regaining consciousness, found my followers gathered around me ; they had been aroused by the thunder, but had seen neither the flames nor the vision of the Great Spirit in his wrath. Nothing could induce me to remain another minute in such an awful vicinity, and I therefore ordered an immediate move onwards, much to my men's discomfiture, for they stumbled about in the darkness and ran imminent risks of falling down precipices. This is my reason for not daring to take you along a road which Pillan has closed to men. But even if it were not so, the way would still be beset with terrible perils to inexperienced mountaineers like yourselves."

"Is it not maddening to think that the human mind is only satisfied by investing an ordinary occurrence with some supernatural attribute?" said the practical Gillett, when Chotil concluded his narrative. "This Indian has probably seen a volcano in eruption scores of times during daylight ; but the very first time he witnesses one in the pitchy darkness, his common-sense deserts him, and he becomes a grovelling idiot with a brain filled with ghosts and spirits and everything that is horrible and depressing. What the fellow really saw was the sudden opening of a new crater, and the diffused light of the subterranean fire. Into the glare thus produced, a volume of smoke is poured, and it assumes the shape of a fantastic Hercules with uplifted arm. A mighty explosion now occurs, followed by a huge

burst of flame ; then that safety-valve called a crater gets filled up by falling rocks ; but the volcano has, for a time, satisfied its necessity for vent ; the fire ceases to be seen, and Nature resumes her usual quietude. *Voilà tout !* Chotil's superstition has converted me to your way of thinking, so I will induce our guide to lead us past his thundering mountain by promising to appease the wrath of Pillan."

To my infinite satisfaction, Gillett, by some means or other, was successful in overcoming Chotil's scruples, and on June 4th—just two hundred and twenty-three years after the last entry in Desmonde's journal—we passed through the gates of Lima with an imposing array of armed men, mules, and baggage, on our search after what everybody had hitherto deemed to be the fabulous country of El Dorado.

"*En route* at last!" was the joyful thought which animated me, as I carefully scrutinized the picked and stalwart men who owned Chotil as their chief. "With such warriors as these, we could storm through the golden gates and take Chalco by assault should such a necessity arise ! "

We soon left the lowlands behind us and commenced toiling through the rugged pass, which was not quite such pleasant travelling as I could have desired. The upward climbing was hard work enough, but some of the declivities down which we had to slide were so frightful as to make me hold my breath and inwardly mutter a prayer. These slopes were very often bounded by precipices varying from five hundred to a thousand feet in depth, and as we generally had a track seldom much more than two feet wide to walk upon, our sensations can better be imagined than described. We trusted our lives solely to the sagacity of the mules, and it was wonderful to see the exactitude of these animals in stretching out their fore-legs to preserve their equilibrium when they realized that they

were about to slide down a precipitous declivity. With a perpendicular wall of rock on one side, a fall of a thousand feet on the other, and a road barely wide enough to admit the mule and its rider, can it be wondered at that, at the end of each day's march, we heartily congratulated one another upon having so far escaped having our necks broken ?

For four days we wended our way through the most magnificent scenery conceivable, and on the fifth we began to leave the tropical forests behind us. At an altitude of nine thousand feet we took our last look at the handsome cinchona trees, and mentally hoped that our stock of quinine would not fail us in the fever swamps to which we were hastening. Gillett looked longingly at them, and turned away with a sigh, born no doubt of his professional delight at seeing in its native habitat, for the first and perhaps for the last time, one of the most valuable weapons in a physician's armamentarium.

We had now passed from torrid heat to a delightful spring climate, and I recognized with pleasure many plants with which I was familiar in England. It gave almost a home-like appearance to the mountain slopes and ravines to see them decorated with blue and scarlet salvias, huge bushes of fuchsia, heliotrope, verbenas, and calceolarias. Though they were flourishing here with the wild beauty and luxuriance derived from their native soil, yet their lovely hues sent my thoughts wandering back to their less robust offspring in less clement Britain ; then from the flowers, my mind began to dwell upon all those subtle and endless associations which combine to teach man that there is no place like home. Bereft as I was of friends and relations, my heart turned with ever-increasing fondness towards that small isle of the sea which had given me birth ; a melancholy musing laid its heavy hand upon me, and refused to quit its grasp for the rest of the day. Gillett eyed me keenly, and said I was suffering from a disease

called "Nostalgia." Somewhat alarmed at the prospect of any illness which might delay our march on Chalco, I asked the doctor to translate the word and describe the symptoms, and I was disgusted to find that he had merely used a learned term for such a simple thing as home-sickness! However, the morbid feeling soon passed off, and I became able to enjoy once more the awe-inspiring prospect of huge conical mountains clad with snow, towering one above the other to stupendous heights, and flashing out flames of marvellous colours and brilliancy.

Higher and higher we mounted, until the last of my sweet home-like flowers vanished from the slopes and gave place to a stunted vegetation. The air became keener as we entered the region of frost, and the cold nights made me feel so uncomfortable that I hailed Chotil's assurance that we should not have to ascend beyond the snow-line with a great deal of genuine pleasure.

As we neared the mountain of Thegthege, our Indian guide began perceptibly to lose some of his assurance, and it was with much trepidation that he pointed out a precipitous descent as being the last we should have to make before reaching the resting-place of Pillan. I looked at the place and shuddered, for it was by far the worst declivity we had yet encountered, and a fear seized me that some of the party were bound to come to grief in climbing down this almost perpendicular rock. When we arrived at the edge of this hideous-looking place, even our mules seemed conscious that something more than usual was required of them, for they stopped on the verge of the slope of their own accord, and carefully surveyed the road in front, or rather below.

The cautious and peculiar movements of these almost reasoning animals under circumstances of extreme peril deserve recording. Preparatory to commencing the descent, they place their fore-feet together as if for the purpose of stopping themselves. Their hind-feet are also closely

approximated and slightly advanced, the whole attitude looking as if they were about to lie down. Then, with a glance at the slope below, they begin to slide with great rapidity. The rider must make no attempt to guide his mule; should he be incautious enough to do so, he runs a great risk of bringing on the catastrophe he is anxious to avert. All he has to do is to sit perfectly still and maintain his equilibrium as best he can. When the animal thinks fit he will stop, insert his fore-feet in a hole, and place himself in the proper posture for another fearful slide, and this continues until the bottom is reached. Over and over again during this rough and tedious passage of the Andes, I was reminded of a sentence in Humboldt's travels, which tells us that the South American muleteers are accustomed to say—"I will not give you the mule whose step is easiest, but *la mas racional*—the one that reasons best." A popular expression like this, dictated by long experience, proves better than all the arguments of speculative philosophy that animals are not mere vivified machines, but possess some share of the reasoning faculty which man is so anxious to exclusively arrogate to himself.

The scraping and bruising that the most fortunate of riders generally gets in these fearful descents is considerable, and serves to keep one in a continual state of soreness and stiffness, not to mention ill-temper. I have never got to such a pitch of hardihood as to regard these terrific slides with anything else than terror, and I have heard since from veteran muleteers that they themselves never entirely lose this feeling.

Chotil led the way, and I watched him shoot down like an avalanche until he turned the corner and passed out of sight. Then came my turn to essay the frightful path, and before starting I patted the mule with a mingled sensation of respect and affection, both of which he richly deserved, for I had hitherto trusted my life to his superior wisdom, and he had never failed me. With a decided

tightening of the breath, I gave the signal, and down we rushed with a giddy velocity until the mule stopped to prepare for another and steeper descent. Of his own accord, this time, the animal went off to accomplish the remainder of the dangerous journey ; and, as we were moving with the speed of an express train, I forgot that the track wound round to the left, so that, as I looked straight ahead, I saw with horror that, if the mule continued his present course, he must inevitably fall headlong into the chasm below. In my horrible fear, I did the maddest of all mad things ! I tried to check the mule, who, had I left him alone, would have borne me safely through everything. I tightened the reins and pulled with all the energy of desperation ; such was my strength that I lifted him round, and in so doing, caused him to lose his foothold. He stumbled and fell, then made a wild effort to recover himself ; but the track was too narrow, his feet shot over the edge, and the next instant I was off his back and falling into the dark, fathomless abyss below.

There are some men of whom it is said that they are not born to be drowned. Though I, individually, may not come into that particular category, yet I am convinced that my fate will not be to be killed by falling over precipices. This was the second time I had undergone that uncomfortable ordeal, yet on this occasion, when I came to my senses, I found that I had not a single bone broken, and felt no worse effects than a slight shock to the system, due to the fall.

For the first few minutes, after recovering from a painful dizziness in the head, I was at a loss to understand the predicament I was in, but gradually the truth dawned upon me that I had alighted upon a thick bed of vegetable matter, some of it alive and growing, the rest dead and decaying. I looked up to the heavens and perceived that I was not more than forty feet from the surface, but when I cast my glance downwards, I realized the awful position I was in.

Below, the depth was so vast that I saw nothing but a fearful, appalling blackness, and then I became aware that the descent had been broken by my body having mercifully fallen upon a jutting-out rock clothed with soft vegetation, but not much more than six feet square.

After the first feeling of thankfulness at so providential an escape had subsided, the idea grew upon me that I had only been preserved from death for a short space, for, situated as I was, far beyond the reach of human aid, it seemed an absolute certainty that I was condemned to suffer the intolerable agonies of slow starvation.

How I anathematized my want of moral courage at the critical moment, and how my poor mule must have wondered at my egregious folly! He, poor thing, had of course terminated his earthly career, and was by this time falling to the centre of the earth. Really, this idea was not so supremely ridiculous, for the rocky funnel in which I was entombed looked deep, black, and vicious enough to be a channel in direct communication with the hottest of places! But I loved my mule. He had shown more sense and reason than his human master, and had I left him to his own devices, we both, in all probability, would be alive and safe now.

I had nothing else to do but to moralize over my cowardice in having given way to an unwarrantable panic of fear; then I am afraid I shed a few weak tears—one for my basely murdered mule and several for myself—and then felt intensely hungry. To satisfy this craving, I cautiously moved about my narrow territory in the hope of finding some edible berries. Notwithstanding a careful search, I could discover nothing capable of sustaining life for a minute, but, in moving about, I made one terrifying discovery that I had not bargained for. The rock which I had deemed my ark of safety was not so in reality, for it was so slenderly attached to the side of the precipice that it oscillated and jerked ominously with every motion of my body.

I shuddered as I reflected that at any moment I might be sent on a second downward flight through the air which must result in death, for I could not hope for another rock so softly clothed to intervene between me and destruction. I tried to comfort myself by imagining that the swift annihilation which would ensue from the giving way of my present resting-place, was far preferable to a slow, torturing death from starvation ; but I refused to be comforted, and fell into a horrible condition of fear at any slight vibration of my rocky perch. From extreme fear I passed into awful despair, and the latter emotion so upset my brain that I either fainted or else fell into a dazed apathy, for Gillett subsequently told me that he, after some trouble, dimly discerned me stretched on the projecting crag, and had shouted till he was hoarse, without receiving any response. Concluding from my silence that I was either dead or insensible, he formed a plan for ascertaining the real state of the case.

When my brain became clearer, I fancied I detected a faint hum of human voices, and on looking upward my heart stood still with mingled hope and fear as I saw Gillett dangling in mid-air attached to a rope which was being slowly let out by the Indians above. This was the second time that his noble unselfishness had prompted him to risk his life to save mine, and as I watched him slowly descending, his peril seemed awful ; the rope appeared strained to its utmost, and should one knot be faultily tied, his doom was inevitable. As I watched my friend coming to the rescue like a gallant hero, thinking nothing of himself but all of me, I took a mental retrospect of the past two years, and the truth flashed upon me that this man, so gentle, patient, brave, and resolute, was one whose friendship even the kings of the earth would be proud to possess. If ever there was a true Christian, there he was risking his own useful life for one that was wasted and profitless. "No greater love hath man than this."

As he neared me, I suddenly remembered the precarious hold of the platform to the side of the chasm, and my alarm broke out afresh at the idea that our combined weight might force it from its position and hurl me off before I had time to fasten myself to the rope which I perceived Gillett was bringing down with him.

I shouted my fears to Gillett, told him I was unhurt, and begged him to have himself drawn up again directly he had placed the second rope in my hand. He understood me, but the Indians who were lowering him misinterpreted the signals, for they had received orders to keep letting the doctor down until he touched the rock, and in their stupidity would not budge from their original instructions. They evidently concluded that the shouts which were wafted to them were orders for increased rapidity in lowering, for the doctor covered the last few yards much too swiftly, and I fairly shivered as he, with a shock, touched the platform. A sharp rattle of dislodged stones and a heaving movement like an earthquake warned me that my worst fears were about to be realized.

"Quick, seize the rope!" shouted Gillett with frantic vehemence.

Even as he spoke, I felt the solid ground sink away from under me, and missing the rope, I made a wild clutch at something, and found myself hanging on to the doctor's leg, and swinging over the dark, bottomless abyss!

Even at this awful moment, my friend's coolness did not desert him. He knew the fearful danger I was in, for he called out to me to keep my presence of mind, and warned me against giving way to panic, for in a very few seconds we should be safe on *terra firma*.

The tremendous jerk which the sudden fall of the rock had caused us to put upon the rope, awoke the Indians to our peril, for with a cry of consternation they commenced hauling up as fast as they could; and when I arrived within a few feet of the surface, Chotil, with great fore-

thought, managed to throw a lasso around me and slip it up until it encircled and supported my waist. He did not do it a moment too soon, for I do not think I could have held on another five seconds. As it was, directly I felt the stout coil around me I relaxed my hold of Gillett's leg, and was dragged in a fainting condition on to solid ground.

In consequence of this episode, we had to delay our march for four days, as my heavy grip on the doctor's leg, besides almost dislocating had temporarily paralyzed it, and perfect rest was absolutely needful. However, on the fifth day he pronounced himself able to sit his mule, so we struck our tents and again resumed the journey.

Fortunately, we had got over the worst part of the road, and the track led us by an easy ascent toward Mount Thegthege, which had become visible in the distance, and at which I often surprised Chotil casting many an anxious glance.

CHAPTER V.

CHEMISTRY *versus* COURAGE.

ON making a reckoning between the time we had already expended in the pass of Thegtheg, and what we should have spent had we travelled along the well-beaten track, I came to the conclusion that we should have been gainers, had I not been so impatient as to urge the adoption of what was a shorter route in miles, but a much longer one in peril and difficulty. It was another exemplification of the old adage, "More haste, less speed"—an adage which is in everybody's mouth, but which is seldom acted upon.

We were now beginning to suffer intensely from the cold, and the greatly reduced density of the atmosphere made respiration painful and laborious. Our Indians, accustomed to torrid heat, were less able to bear the continuous frosts than we were, and some of them even suffered from an oozing of blood from the lips and gums. Vegetation got scantier, until at last it became confined to a species of rush, resembling the broom, but much softer and more flexible, and a peculiar plant having a round bulbous head. Higher still, the earth was utterly devoid of any living thing, and was covered with eternal snow ; but fortunately the road spared us the inconvenience of battling with glaciers and other dangers of Alpine travelling. Nevertheless, we were all sufficiently uncomfortable, and anxiously looked forward to the time when we should have rounded Chotil's dreaded mountain, and have commenced the downward route into warm and smiling valleys.

But misfortune seemed determined to dog us in this miserable pass, and on this occasion it was due either to the fear or stupidity of our Indian guide. We had had a long day's march, for we were all agreed to get out of this inhospitable region as soon as possible, and were looking forward to our well-earned rest, when Chotil advanced to the doctor and myself with a look of perplexity on his face.

"Well, chief," exclaimed Gillett cheerfully, "what has gone amiss to wreath your usually placid brow with such funereal gloom?"

"Ah, Machi!" answered Chotil, "Pillan has sent us another warning to abstain from treading on his holy ground. First he sent his spirits to cast your friend into the abyss, and now he has bereft me of my senses."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Gillett, opening his eyes very widely and staring fixedly at the Indian. "In what way has he poured this calamity upon you? I see nothing unusual in your manner, except that it is perhaps a trifle more solemn."

As the doctor uttered these words, the leading files of the Indians came to an abrupt halt, and threw the whole cavalcade into disorder. Various interjections and guttural sentences were bandied about from one to the other, whilst we were in perfect ignorance of the meaning of so much confusion.

"See!" said Chotil, as if in answer to our inquiring looks. "Pillan has bewildered my mind, so that I have led you astray!"

Without saying a word, Gillett and I rode forward, and perceived with dismay that the track suddenly terminated in a wide chasm, which would tax the resources of an engineer and a whole army of stonemasons to bridge. All progress was thus cut off in this direction, and we looked in vain for the least semblance of a road over which we could travel. There was evidently no help for it now but to back our mules until we came to a place sufficiently

wide to turn them round, and then retrace our steps until we were fortunate enough to hit off the right path.

Having come to this conclusion, we went back to where we had left Chotil standing gloomy and silent. We were both fearfully enraged at this *contretemps*, and, knowing the Indian's superstitious terror, strongly suspected him of being guilty of treachery in order to make us turn back.

"Thou art right!" exclaimed Gillett as soon as he regained the chief's side. "Pillan has bewitched thee, and has turned thy courage into cowardice. Go! Thou art no longer a fit companion for the Machi of the pale-faces!"

Chotil's eyes gleamed as he listened to the doctor's insulting speech. For a moment he stood in deep thought, as if pondering whether to accept his liberty or not; then his mind was made up, and he spoke.

"Look over the chasm which now stops us, and there thou canst plainly see the road that thou wouldest be traversing, winding round the north side of Thegtheg. Look at it well, for thou wilt never plant thy foot thereon, for how canst thou get there unless Chotil guides thee?"

This seemed so true a proposition that I hurriedly whispered to Gillett that he had better withdraw his words, and take the man again into favour—anyhow until we were well over these horrible Andes.

"I spoke hastily and foolishly whilst red-hot with anger," replied Gillett in a cautious undertone. "But it is too late to think of an apology, for he would only regard it as a confession of weakness, and take the first opportunity of washing out the insult in my blood. I must, therefore, now carry the business through with a high hand, and trust to my knowledge of chemistry to assert my magical character and cow the whole band, who will assuredly take their chief's part if we come to blows."

Gillett had carefully studied the Indian character, feeling sure that he would have some difficulty or other to quell before the expedition was ended. He had foreseen

that Chotil's superstition would break out in mutiny or treachery as soon as we sighted Thegtheg, and had therefore acquainted me with his intentions as to how we were both to deal with it. Gillett's argument convinced me that an apology had no meaning to a savage, so I acquiesced in his determination to browbeat the treacherous guide. In another minute, the doctor was at it more boastfully and scurriously than ever.

"When thou didst surrender thy charm, thou didst give up thy courage," said Gillett. "But I promised thee, in return for perfect obedience, that Pillan would restore thy bravery fourfold. Where are now thine obedience and thy courage? Both have gone. I have therefore no further need of thee, and whilst thou art sitting in thy wigwam with the squaws, mending arrows for the braves, I shall have passed over thy sacred mountain and be feasting with the mighty magicians of the golden country. Go, and thy men with thee, if they will follow a chief who is so woman-hearted that he is only fit to mend the weapons of the courageous!"

If malice and hatred could have annihilated, Gillett would have been a dead man then and there, for Chotil shot an utterly demoniacal glance at his master, and handled his spear most ominously. But wiser counsels prevailed, and he refused to be provoked into the first act of open hostility.

"Why do you stand there and hesitate?" asked Gillett, following up his bombshell. "I want not thy guidance to leap over the chasm, for I could, if it pleased me, call down the lightnings to blast the rocks and pile them into a bridge across the abyss. Go, therefore. I have spoken!"

"Pile Pelion on Ossa!" I muttered, very much amused at my friend's extravagant boast. "Send for Cotopaxi and Chimborazo, and even with their aid you would hardly span this annoying gap!"

"For goodness' sake, preserve some appearance of gravity!" ejaculated the doctor angrily. "This is much too serious a matter to joke over."

"And yet we are about to perpetrate a joke which will make us laugh heartily, and the Indians cringe terribly!"

My levity helped to make Gillett more solemn than ever. As I looked at him, solemnity seemed to solidify on his face, and I felt I could cut it with as much ease as I could a piece of cake. "Did you ever see the likeness of a muchness?" is a question asked in that inimitable book, *Alice in Wonderland*; and I really think that some day I shall be able to answer in the affirmative, for after what I saw on the doctor's expressive countenance, I shall never despair of meeting with the abstract in a concrete form. I am sure that my behaviour on this, as well as on many other occasions, was sufficient to exasperate any man, and I can only plead in extenuation that I am possessed with an unfortunate faculty of more often seeing the ridiculous side of things than their serious aspect. I do not advise any one to cultivate such a faculty, for where it will raise a laugh once, it will lead to disaster a hundred times.

Whilst I was annoying the doctor with my ill-timed jests, Chotil had withdrawn to his men and was consulting with them. Some were evidently urging an attack, for half a dozen spears were being brandished aloft fiercely, and their owners moved about as if thirsting for blood. By this time, fortunately, the light was beginning to fade, and perhaps this fact delayed the attack, for the narrow foothold would only permit of one man coming for us at a time, and long before one could have reached us, our revolvers would have picked off eight or ten of them.

Chotil now came forward with a proud and sullen expression.

"Machi!" he began. "Thou art not greater than Pillan, and thou canst not make his servants disobey his commands. We will therefore encamp here peaceably

until the morning, when we will go our way and thou shalt go thine."

"Thou art speaking with a forked tongue. Great Pillan has revealed it unto me," answered Gillett sternly. "But thou shalt rest here, and if thou art meditating treachery, the fire of the Machi shall consume thee!"

The Indians retired and huddled themselves and the baggage-mules into an open space about thirty yards from where we were standing. We then went back a short distance until we found a similar space and a cleft in the rock sufficiently large to lodge us comfortably. We thought that we should have to go supperless, but Chotil kept up the farce of wishing us no harm by sending an Indian, unarmed, to attend to our creature comforts as usual.

Notwithstanding the extreme cold, Gillett declined to have a fire lighted, so there we sat shivering and endeavouring to enjoy our meal by the dim light of a lantern.

"What is going to be the upshot of this business?" I asked, as soon as I had appeased my hunger.

"An attack in force!" replied Gillett with his mouth full.

"By Jove!" I answered. "Had we not better claim the ammunition-mule before the beggars begin to search for the cartridges?"

"To claim any baggage would merely precipitate hostilities," said the doctor. "They already look upon our goods as their lawful spoil, but they won't have them for all that. As for the cartridges, they are perfectly useless to them, for, as I anticipated some trouble in the neighbourhood of Thegtheg, I have purposely refrained from giving instruction in the use of the guns until perfect confidence was established between us all. Thus they have the guns and the ammunition, but not a shot will be fired against us to-night."

"All hail to thee, Machi Gillett!" I exclaimed. "Thou

art a veritable seer with power to foresee coming events, and magic enough to prepare for them beforehand."

"Pooh!" ejaculated the doctor, irritated by my mocking tone. "I can only hope that my example may knock a little common sense into that thing of yours you unworthily exalt by calling it a brain! Cultivate your powers of observation instead of your faculty of derision, and in course of years you may convert your low cerebral organism into a higher nerve tissue."

"I am in for a lecture on nerve cells—white and gray!" I thought. I therefore abruptly stopped the threatened infliction by asserting that I was sure I heard a stealthy footstep. Gillett promptly jumped up, peered round our rocky fortress, went a short distance up the track, and then returned to tell me I had discovered a mare's-nest. I affected to be very sorry for the trouble I had given him, and attributed it to the low condition of my nerves, at which statement he gave vent to an angry exclamation. But I had gained my point, and the physiology of the nervous system was not to be dinned into me that evening.

"It is about time that we set about making arrangements for Chotil's reception," Gillett remarked after he had recovered his good-humour.

"It will be a very unwholesome reception," I replied. "Luckily for us the wind, or rather the gentle breeze, will blow direct into their faces."

We now began to unload Gillett's special baggage-mule which he always kept near him, as it was charged with his scientific instruments and chemical apparatus. We seized upon a quantity of black oxide of manganese and common salt, mixed them, and filled twenty jars with the substance; into each jar was inserted a small glass phial containing sulphuric acid. Armed with these novel weapons, we crept quietly up the track some thirty yards and deposited them in rows on the ground. Our next proceeding was to connect each phial of acid with the wires of the battery in

our rocky crevice. This formed our first line of defence. Ten yards behind this we carefully deposited a small canister of dynamite, which was also connected with a second battery in the fortress. If the enemy succeeded in evading the perils of this chemical warfare, they would then have to reckon with the very latest arms of precision.

Altogether, I was thoroughly satisfied with our defensive arrangements, and sincerely hoped, for the sake of the success of the expedition, that Gillett's first line of defence would prove too strong for the Indians and give us a bloodless victory, as well as reduce our rebellious followers to blind obedience. We had one more thing to do, and then our preparations would be complete. It consisted in putting on our *pyjamas* and giving them a good coating of luminous paint. Our aspect now must have been fear-inspiring, as seen on a dark night. Gillett, as the superior demon, had not spared his face, and the result was that he seemed literally blazing with an unearthly light!

Thus fully equipped to terrify the Indians into submission rather than massacre them, we sat down, smoked in silence, and intently listened for the first sound of the approaching enemy. As they usually make their attack about the hour preceding daybreak, we only occasionally crept as far as the manganese pots to reconnoitre.

About midnight it became my turn to go on outpost duty, so shrouding my blazing attire in a heavy Indian robe, I went forth, revolver in hand, feeling remarkably chilly and sleepy. No sooner had I reached the foremost trenches—otherwise the manganese jars—than a dislodged stone rattled down the sides of the precipice, drove away my drowsiness, and warned me that the expected attack was about to be delivered. The next moment I caught sight of the stealthy, creeping forms of the Indians, headed by Chotil, whose keen eyes also detected my presence, which he acknowledged by shooting an arrow at me. The dark-

ness fortunately made a correct aim difficult, so I turned and fled unscathed back to Gillett.

"Quick, fire the mine!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "Chotil will have passed over it by this time."

Without a word the doctor connected a wire with his battery, and immediately the manganese jars burst into flame, which was rapidly obscured by the dense, overpowering volumes of chlorine gas disengaged by the action of the sulphuric acid. The electric current did its work admirably by setting in motion a mechanical contrivance, whereby the thin phial of acid was broken and its contents poured on to the powder beneath, thus setting up the chemical action which was necessary for the production of the stifling, malodorous chlorine.

The success of our scheme was instantly apparent. The impenetrable silence which the Indians had hitherto maintained was broken by a perfect volley of coughs and other suffocative exclamations, which gradually faded away in the distance as the discomfited foe rushed headlong away from such a Gehenna!

Meanwhile, we had thrown off our dark robes, and stood, two flaming figures of light, ready to follow up the flying fugitives. As we stepped out of our crevice, revolvers in hand, a dusky form suddenly fell prostrate at our feet, and when we cautiously stooped to see who it was, we recognized the features of the traitorous Chotil! It was indeed a marvellous stroke of good luck which had so opportunely placed the ringleader in our power; he had evidently passed the manganese jars just before they were fired, and then the clouds of suffocating vapour formed a dense barrier which effectually separated him from his companions.

He grovelled at our feet in abject terror, and so I believe would any educated Englishman had he met us in this guise in a dark country lane. Civilization and knowledge have improved the human race in every other respect except in

destroying the belief in and horror at the supernatural. It is part of our nature, innate, ingrained in us at our birth ; it was a dominant power in the earlier ages of the world, and will continue to exert more or less influence upon our moral and social welfare until earth shall become hoary with age, and life cease to exist upon its worn-out crust.

"Get up," said Gillett, in a voice ringing with sternness. "Thou hast been punished enough, so I will spare thy life."

The wretched creature rose to his feet, trembling and crestfallen, and then we perceived that he was decorated in the full war-paint of the Souchi tribe.

"Did I not tell thee that Pillan had warned me that thy tongue was forked ?" asked Gillett. "Does the chief come to another man in peace time and ask him to smoke the *calumet* with bars of vermillion on his cheeks and the totem of his tribe displayed on his forehead ? Thou art false, treacherous, and bereft of courage. From such as thou art the Machi hides his face. Go, therefore, into the world which shall no more look smilingly upon thee, for Pillan hath set his mark on thy brow. Get thee hence, and let me see thee no more."

"Master, great master, the Machi through whom Pillan speaks his wishes, hear me !" implored the humbled chief.

"Say what thou hast to say quickly," answered Gillett. "I have no time to waste, for I must soon begin the incantations which will carry my friend and myself to the track on Mount Thegtheg."

"I will be brief," said Chotil, who seemed grateful for the permission to speak. "When I told you that the Great Spirit had bewildered my mind so that I lost the track, I meditated no treachery, nor had I wilfully misled you. Had you listened to me, I should have said that two days ago I ought to have turned up a steep path to the

right instead of continuing straight on to this chasm. But you would not hear me ; you used words which a chief can never forgive. Then my heart became hardened, and Pillan still further blinded my understanding with thoughts of revenge, so that I incited my men to attack you whilst you were asleep. But who can fight against the Machi who can clothe himself with fire, and send clouds of death-dealing vapour from out of the hard rock ? I submit, and will henceforth be your humble slave, if I am only permitted to follow you to the golden country."

"All's well that ends well!" I remarked *sotto voce* to Gillett. "Close with his offer, for if you don't, we shall never find our way back to civilization."

"Go back to your men, and tell them of the wonderful power of the Machi," said the doctor to Chotil. "Tell them that I could consume them as the fire does the dry grass of the Pampas, but that I am merciful and spare them. From this time I shall expect perfect submission to my will, and, in return, I will restore thy courage and once more treat thee as a friend."

The chief, in his delight at hearing these conciliatory words, was about to evince his gratitude by seizing the doctor's hand and pressing it to his forehead, when I thought I saw an opportunity of keeping up the illusion concerning our magical character.

"Touch him not!" I exclaimed, apparently in great alarm. "Touch him not, or his fire will burn thee up!"

Chotil drew back terrified, and, at my suggestion, went off to seek his men and convince them of the futility of waging war against the white magicians. After he had been gone about half an hour, we thought it advisable to show ourselves to our followers, and receive their submission whilst they were still labouring under the fear aroused by their leader's extraordinary recital. We therefore divested ourselves of our luminous war-paint, and speedily gained their camping-ground. There was some

trepidation visible amongst them at our unexpected appearance, but Gillett's gracious words of pardon soon put them at their ease, and we retired feeling sure that we need anticipate no further trouble.

Now that all the excitement had passed, we began to feel the bitterness of the cold, so we had a fire lighted and then began to prepare for some much-needed sleep. The doctor, however, seemed in a talkative mood, and as he sipped his hot brandy-and-water, commenced to discuss our Souchi chief very minutely. He was inclined to exonerate him from having purposely led us along the wrong road, an opinion with which I could not entirely agree, although I felt bound to admit that, up to this unlucky evening, his behaviour had been everything that could be desired. I also expressed my belief that if Gillett had not hurled so many insultingly opprobrious epithets at him, such a thing as a mutiny would never have entered his head. I could not help feeling a certain amount of respect for a man who refused to allow himself to be insulted with impunity, although, of course, I deprecated the method by which he had endeavoured to show his resentment.

"Chotil's race, the Araucanians, are a remarkable people," I continued. "They have a very fair civilization, and have preserved their independence for centuries against the all-conquering Spaniard. Their personal bravery is unimpeachable, yet so superstitious are they, that, though they would unflinchingly charge a battery of cannon, they would shrink with terror from an owl!"

"These native races puzzle me exceedingly," replied Gillett. "Not only the Araucanian, but more especially the old Peruvian and Mexican civilizations are such perfect enigmas that they have confused the wisest heads in Europe. I am half inclined, with respect to Chotil's countrymen, to give credence to an idea I picked up somewhere, that they are the descendants of an ancient Phœnician

colony. We know that the men of Tyre and Sidon were mighty sailors and traders who pushed their commerce far beyond the limits of the Mediterranean coast-line, so that the theory does not seem wholly untenable. It is too difficult a task for me to believe that these three civilized nations of America had anything in common with the savage hordes of the interior. The mere fact of this advanced state of material progress being found chiefly on the sea-board, would make me credit any reasonable hypothesis which attempted to show that the Peruvians, Aztecs, and Araucanians were races of men entirely alien to the aboriginal inhabitants."

"I am afraid you are at variance with Dr. Morton's theory," I answered. "After a careful study of all the craniological characters of the American Indians from Canada to Patagonia, he came to the conclusion that the whole of the numerous tribes have the same physical characters and are of the same race; and in this opinion he is backed up by Agassiz."

"The question of the origin of the human family from one or several stocks is still in its infancy," said Gillett. "The opinions of the learned are so diverse that I shall take the liberty of forming my own pet theory on the subject. I have not had the same opportunities for observation as Morton had, so I cannot dogmatize too confidently just at present. But the study is an interesting one, and when I think that my researches may help to elucidate the vexed question, I will write a book and dedicate it to you."

"Thanks for the intended honour," I replied with a yawn. "But there is one point which I hope will be correctly solved in your projected *magnum opus*, and it involves an explanation of the extraordinary but undoubted fact that the Indians who live on the equator do not differ from those who live almost on the verge of the Arctic circle."

" You need not wait to read my book for an interpretation of the fact," replied the doctor. " I can give it you immediately, and it is based upon the hypothesis that the Americas have only been inhabited in comparatively recent times. Mr. Bates has proved in a very able manner that the Red Indian of Equatorial America is a stranger in his own home, that is, that he is so new an importation that his constitution has not even yet become acclimatized to a tropical existence. He backs up his contention by adducing evidence to show that the Negro, with a system inured to heat through a thousand generations, can endure life in the tropics with impunity, whilst the supposed native Indian falls an easy prey to the epidemics incidental to hot latitudes. Even the European can beat the native on his own ground by being better able to bear long exposure to the sun, or excessive heat ; but some of this capacity for greater endurance may not improbably be due to cleaner habits, more wholesome food obtained with ease and regularity, and the character of the clothing. Mr. Bates, in my humble opinion, has adopted an unassailable position in assuming the recent peopling of this continent. By the term 'recent' you must not imagine I am using a limit of two or three thousand years. We have paintings in the Egyptian temples quite 4000 years old, in which are figured Negroes, Greeks, Jews, and Mongols, and yet their peculiarities of type are as distinct now as they were then. This teaches us that a vast period must elapse before any divergence from the similarity of the common stock becomes so noticeable as to attract attention."

" What is the time ? " I asked, as the doctor paused for breath.

" Nearly half-past two."

" Then, as we commence another arduous day's work at six, I shall go to sleep without further notice, so good-night ! "

" I should just like to impress this one fact upon you

first," pleaded the doctor. "As I was saying, vast periods must elapse before——"

How much longer the lecture was continued I know not, for long before he had arrived at some very interesting climax, his voice began to sound far distant and finally ceased to be audible. I had, in a manner most unflattering to the professor's exposition, gone fast asleep!

CHAPTER VI.

WHO CAN WITHSTAND THE WRATH OF PILLAN?

TIRED out as I was, my sleep proved anything but profound, for I was troubled with a series of unpleasant dreams, one of which vividly pictured Gillett, myself, and the Indians in the act of bombarding Chalco. How our big guns had been conveyed across the vast swamps which surrounded us was one of those mysteries into which the sleeping thoughts never inquire too closely, but there they were, and the roar which they made when they were fired seemed a perfect reality.

Whilst I was busily engaged in cheering on my men, I received a wound in the face, and was in the act of stanching the flow of blood, when I awoke. Singularly enough, the pain in the face did not vanish with the dream, and on putting my hand to the supposed hurt, I discovered that I had received a small, though veritable wound. At this moment my eyes rested on some red-hot cinders lying scattered close to my side ; they must have flown out of the fire whilst I was sleeping, and one had alighted on my cheek, and so caused the sensation of pain.

Having satisfactorily solved this problem, I next remarked with a vague feeling of uneasiness that whereas when I closed my eyes an hour or two ago there was a sharp, biting frost in the night air, there was now a warm, oppressive, sulphurous atmosphere. As I was wondering at this sudden change of temperature, a low rumbling of

distant thunder made me think it was due to the approach of one of those storms which rage with such fearful violence amongst the tall peaks of the Andes. Whilst meditating on the discomfort and danger of an elemental war raging at close quarters, I happened to look towards the place where Gillett had laid himself down to sleep, and was somewhat surprised and alarmed to find that he was absent. I was on the point of starting off to seek him when he appeared before me.

" You seem as sleepless as I am, notwithstanding the exciting day we had of it yesterday," I exclaimed.

" Who could possibly sleep in this suffocating atmosphere?" he replied, in such a grave tone that I tried hard to catch a glimpse of his face through the semi-darkness.

" You speak as if you were going to your own funeral!" I said banteringly.

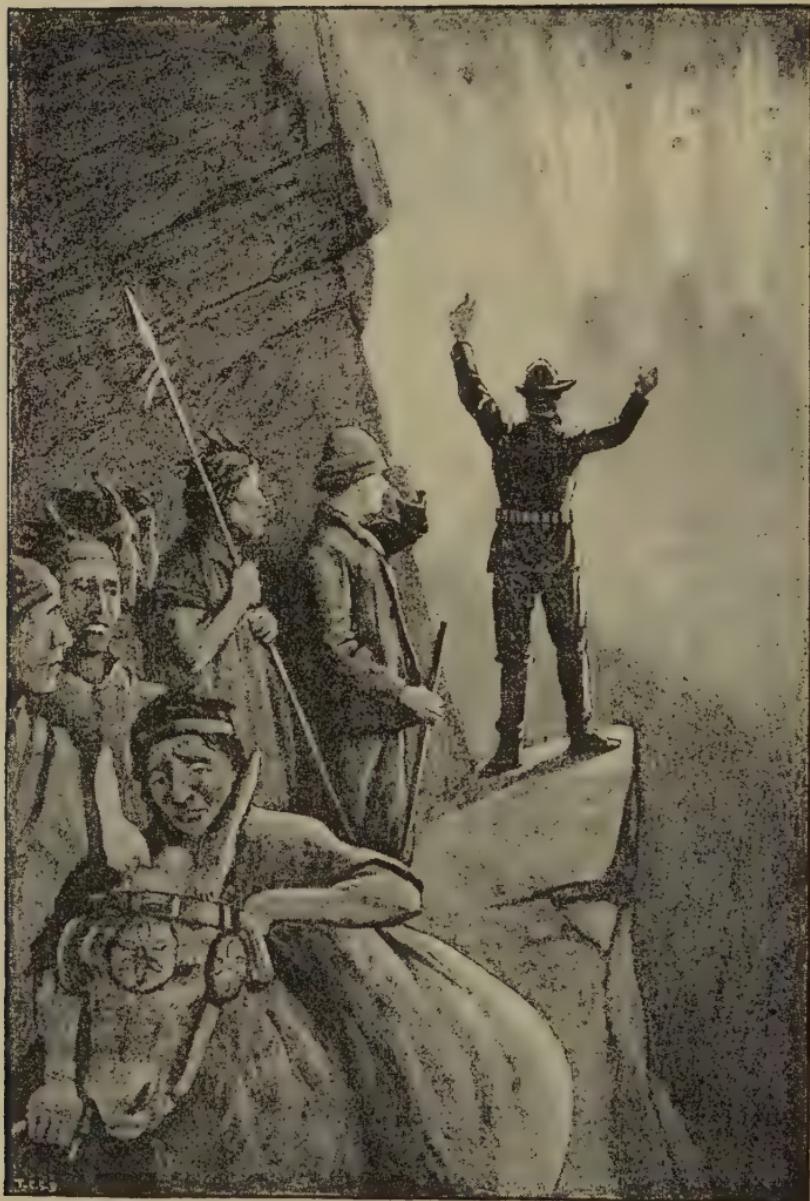
" There is many a true word spoken in jest, and you may be much nearer the truth than you imagine," was his answer in still graver accents. " Do you think that this sudden heat, which is melting the snow on yonder mountain, portends nothing—that it is not the harbinger of some terrific convulsion of nature? Yet I assure you that not a quarter of a mile away from where we stand, there will shortly commence so wild an upheaval of hill and rock, that our escape from annihilation is scarcely possible."

" I suppose you mean that we are about to witness a volcanic eruption?"

" Exactly," replied Gillett; " and, worst of all, it will burst forth from Chotil's infernal three-peaked mountain of Thegtheg."

" By Jove! Won't that turn the laugh against the Machi!" I exclaimed. " But as this is no time for joking, but for thinking of our safety, I propose that we load up the mules and retreat as rapidly as possible."

" I ordered that to be done half an hour ago," answered Gillett. " Chotil is directed to go back on the path we



"Look! It is even now commencing."—*p. 83.*

toiled up so wearily yesterday afternoon, to take advantage of the first suitable place that can afford some protection against the showers of red-hot ashes that will presently rain down, and there await my further commands."

"You are always to the front when prompt action is required," I exclaimed, from a genuine feeling of admiration for the decision and promptitude he had displayed whilst I was tossing about in a restless slumber.

"Let us go further up the road to the edge of the chasm," said the doctor after a pause. "We shall be able to command a better view there of the volcano."

As we moved off, Chotil came down to say that his men had just completed the task of loading the mules. He accompanied us back to where the Indians were standing, and was about to give the order to march, when an exclamation from Gillett arrested our attention.

"Look!" he said, stretching both his hands towards Thegtheg in a manner probably intended to make Chotil believe that he was performing an incantation before Pillan. "Look! It is even now commencing."

I looked across the chasm at the mountain on which we would have been encamped at this very moment had it not been for the chief's foolish mistake, and saw a dense column of vapour rising vertically up to the height of a hundred feet or more. As I gazed awestruck yet fascinated, vivid flashes of flame penetrated the black cloud, lighting up the heavens for a few seconds, and then disappeared, leaving us in a darkness more profound than night.

"We cannot be too thankful to Chotil for having led us astray," I remarked. "It seems as if Providence had specially interposed to prevent our being over there at this minute."

"Do not imagine you are much safer here," answered Gillett. "The only peril we shall escape by being on this side of the chasm is death from the torrents of boiling lava."

No sooner had he ceased speaking than a terrific, deafening crash resounded through the still air, and the ground on which we stood vibrated so fearfully that we looked at one another appalled. Enormous flames followed the bursting open of a new crater, and huge rocks, blazing scoriæ, and boiling water began to scatter themselves broadcast through the lurid heavens, and to hurtle through the air in unpleasant proximity to our position.

So absorbed had we all been in watching the magnificent sight, that we had forgotten to give the order for the retreat of our baggage-mules. These animals recalled us to a sense of our forgetfulness by uttering loud snorts of fear, and stamping about as if threatening to break loose from restraint. The doctor lost no further time in sending them away, and we saw them being led off in so orderly a manner that we heartily congratulated ourselves upon having retained the services of such a fine body of men, and so seemingly impervious to panic. After watching the retreating Indians I turned to Chotil, who still remained with us, and noticed so many signs of uneasiness that I could not help asking him if he was afraid of the volcano.

"Chotil never has fear when he has to deal with men," he replied haughtily. "But can he behold unmoved the wrath of mighty Pillan, who is about to punish the sacrilege of which we are guilty? Who can withstand him? Even the white Machi is as stubble in his hands."

"How do you know that this is not the work of the Machi Gillett?" I inquired. "Did you not hear him say that he had an incantation to utter during the night, and did you not see him stretch forth his hands unto Pillan in the midst of the fiery, thundering mountain?"

The chief stared at me in astonishment, as if such an idea altered the whole complexion of the case.

"Then we shall not die," he exclaimed joyfully. "The Machi is a friend to Pillan, who will save us for his sake."

I did not attempt to destroy this new-born hope, which, if we escaped from our present predicament, would help to cement Gillett's influence by affording another proof of his supernatural powers.

The volcano, which had been quiescent for a few minutes, now burst forth afresh with a roar that must have been heard a hundred miles off. A huge cloud of smoke spread over the heavens and obscured the stars, leaving us in pitchy darkness. Instinctively we grasped one another, for the touch of a human companion, at a time when a horrible death seems inevitable, becomes a real solace. I could see neither Gillett nor Chotil, but presently the voice of the former, calm and low, fell on my ear.

"I know of only one historic parallel to our case—that of the elder Pliny, who stood and watched an eruption of Vesuvius much in the same way as we are doing now. He fell, poor man, a martyr to science and humanity."

"How was that?" I asked, glad to hear the sound of a human voice from out of this appalling blackness.

"Don't you know the story?" he replied. "Well then, here it is in brief. On the 24th of August, A.D. 79, whilst Pliny was at Misenum, an eruption of Vesuvius occurred. As a lover of science, he naturally wished to view the phenomenon as closely as possible, so he accordingly went in his ship as near the coast as he could. Then seeing that the town of Stabiæ was threatened with destruction from the enormous quantity of ashes which the mountain vomited forth, he hastened there to help the people. On landing, he continued to watch the spectacle from a house, but a violent earthquake so shook it that he sought safety by going into the open country. My belief is that he purposely bent his steps towards Vesuvius with the intention of taking observations. Anyhow, he fell down suffocated by the vile sulphurous vapour, and died a martyr to science."

"I believe that I shall be suffocated in the same way,"

I remarked. "I am not so curious as Pliny was to see the *dénouement*, for this hard struggle for breath is enough to destroy enthusiasm in any man!"

The Cimmerian darkness suddenly lifted, and, ushered in by another roar of subterranean artillery, a huge red flame shot up from the crater, bearing with it missiles of enormous size, which fortunately were projected in a nearly vertical direction, though some of them fell with a thundering noise into the chasm at our feet.

Fascinated by the grandeur of the sight, and feeling somewhat more secure from having hitherto escaped a catastrophe, we maintained our position for over an hour whilst the mountain continued without cessation to pour forth smoke, flames, and rock. As far as the eye could reach, the air had assumed an extraordinary violet tint, and the masses of bare rock, rugged craters, and solid lava, which had looked so desolate in the daylight, now presented an appearance of most varied brilliancy. The longer we contemplated this fairy transformation scene, the less able were we to tear ourselves away from it. We were so deeply impressed with sensations of dread and wonder that we might have stood there far into the morning, lost in amazement at the violence yet grandeur of Nature's convulsive throes, had not a new phenomenon driven us terrified from our vantage-ground.

We had watched with great interest the flow of a mighty torrent of burning lava down the side of the mountain into the chasm which, luckily for us, intervened between our ridge and the craters of Thegtheg. This lava, in its course, probably tapped the gaseous material contained in a lower crater, and the result of this contact was the upheaval of a vast column of fiery liquid granite from the depths of the chasm. The moment we saw it shoot up we turned to run, and its burning breath passed so close that I almost gave myself up for lost. However, with something like superhuman energy, we rushed pell-

mell down the rocky slope, tumbling over one another in our mad terror, until we had placed a huge barrier of solid mountain between us and the raging, burning torrent. Our arrival amongst the other Indians was opportune, for they had become so alarmed by the fearful din, as well as by our continued absence, that they had given us up for lost, and were just on the point of fleeing further down the mountain. At our suggestion, Chotil went amongst them and calmed their fears by assuring them that the volcano was raised by the Machi, and would do them no harm if they kept quiet where they were.

During the remainder of that awful night we cowered under our rocky shelter, half suffocated by the sulphurous exhalations, half frozen, wholly miserable, and expectant of death. The violent oscillations of the earth, the thundering crashes as innumerable fragments of subterranean rocks were dislodged and vomited forth, the lurid glare which enveloped us, the poison-laden air—all combined to form the most inconceivably hideous experience of my life.

Daylight came at last and revealed faces blanched with fear, exposure, and fatigue. To my excited mind even the Indians seemed to have become pallid, but this perhaps was mere imagination. At seven o'clock the volcano became quiescent, and the dense volumes of smoke, which hung like a murky pall overhead, gradually cleared away and gave us a view of the heavens covered with dark, angry-looking thunder-clouds. From down the sides of Thegtheg there poured thousands of tons of melted snow, which, coming in contact with boiling lava, caused such a continuous succession of loud reports and terrific hissing, that we were almost deafened, and had to shout to one another to be heard. The steaming vapour which resulted from this ebullition on a huge scale filled the valleys and chasms with so dense a mist that it was dangerous for any of us to attempt to wander from our camping-ground.

A drenching downpour of rain now came on, and con-

tinued steadily until midday, when, as if by magic, the clouds dispersed, and the sun's blessed beams shed into our wet bodies and forlorn hearts their warm and comforting rays. Neither Gillett nor I had felt the least inclination to talk during the whole of this miserable morning, but the instant we experienced the light and heat of the great life-giving luminary, confidence revived, and we turned simultaneously to one another, each with a joyful expression.

"There is hope for us yet," exclaimed Gillett. "The volcano has discontinued its artillery fire for nearly six hours, and should it remain quiescent long enough to enable us to get beyond its range, we may live to look upon the events of the past night as a sight we would not have missed for anything."

"Speak for yourself, but not for me," I replied, with a faint attempt at a laugh. "Man is a boastful animal, but place him in the midst of such a scene as we have lately witnessed, and his pride in himself sinks to zero, and his soul becomes laden with a most abject fear of death. Judging by myself, he recalls every vicious incident of his past life, and makes many a vow of amendment should he be spared from being hurled a little sooner into eternity than his years warrant. Yet, the danger overcome, he straightway forgets his resolves; pride returns, and with it the love of magnifying himself. His deeds of daring, his hairbreadth escapes, are narrated at the club with the gusto of a man who has seen more and braved more than any of his audience, and he expects to be told so. He carefully suppresses the terror, agony, and anguish he went through, for to confess that would be to acknowledge himself a bit of a coward after all. As far as I am concerned, I have been the veriest coward throughout the whole of this appalling performance. I stayed where I was because I did not dare to run away, feeling only too fearful of being caught in a boiling stream of lava, or

crushed out of all semblance to humanity by a falling rock. Is this craven terror a thing to boast about? Believe me, Gillett, if anybody should say whilst I am narrating this event, 'I wouldn't have missed such a magnificent sight for anything,' I shall reply, 'I would have given anything to have missed it.' Probably you will say that my ideas are still biased by the terror I have undergone, but it is not so, and I am convinced that they will remain the same when I am thousands of miles away from here, and sitting safely at home in my arm-chair."

"Your remarks may be true of some men, but they are too sweeping to be applied generally," answered the doctor. "If a man is truthful, he cannot allow pride to suppress some facts and unduly magnify others, from which you may deduce that the boaster is an habitual suppressor of the truth."

Chotil's appearance broke off the conversation. He brought us the very unwelcome news that one of the Indians was missing; he had been seen with the baggage-mules at the time we ordered their retreat; but whether he had gone with them down the track or not was unknown. This decided us to set out immediately on a reconnoitring expedition, and the Indians' former encampment on the edge of the chasm was the point we determined to make for. As we turned a corner to regain the road, we became aware of the imminent peril we had been in, for less than thirty yards away from our place of refuge we came across enormous boulders, piled one above the other in inextricable confusion, which had been thrown there by the force of the volcano, and any one of which was huge enough to crush the whole party.

We had to send back to the camp for ropes to help us to surmount these formidable obstacles; and they were formidable in more than one sense, for they had so obscured the original track that we were often in danger of losing our way. At length, after infinite labour, we

arrived at the edge of the chasm, but it had become so altered that it took us a long time to recognize it as the same we had gazed upon a few hours previously. On looking into its depths, we saw that it was, in some places, nearly half filled with the *débris* of the mountain, whilst a boiling river of lava, glowing with a dusky redness, meandered along it for some distance and then fell with a fiendish roar into an abyss of unknown profundity. I could hardly conceive it possible that such a Titanic havoc—such a Herculean task—could have been accomplished in so short a time. The volcanic mountain, in its present state of perfect quiescence, looked like nothing more than a peaceful conglomeration of gigantic rocks; but what surprised me most was that a huge slice had been irregularly cut off from each of its three apices, thus lessening its height by nearly forty feet. The horror of the previous night was still on me, and I fell to moralizing on the similarity between the peaceful mountain which contained in its bosom the slumbering elements of destruction, and nations which possessed beneath their civilization and Christianity as great a capacity for creating dire havoc both in the physical and the moral world.

A cry from Gillett, who had wandered a little distance away whilst I stood still lost in reflection, arrested my thoughts. I hastened towards him as fast as the uneven surface of the rocks would permit, and found him in a great state of excitement.

“Look here, Wrenforth!” he exclaimed. “Out of evil comes good. The eruption has been a blessing in disguise, and has prevented the necessity of our repassing that fearful precipice where you so nearly lost your life. It has, in fact, been the means of saving us four days’ arduous toil.”

I carefully fixed my eyes on the point to which he directed my attention, and at a depth of only eight feet from the top of the chasm, I saw with extreme delight a broad pile of rocks thrown across by the volcano from one

side to the other, and communicating directly with the track on which we had hitherto so hopelessly longed to set our feet.

"It is a rough and uneven bridge," said Gillett, breaking the silence; "but I think it might be practicable for the mules, if it were not for the danger of a fresh outburst of this furious volcano. The question to decide is, whether we dare trust ourselves on the treacherous slopes of Thegtheg?"

My delight was somewhat damped by this consideration, and I stared long and viciously at the stumbling-block before returning an answer. Another eruption whilst we were ascending its sides would assuredly be fatal, yet, with the worst part of our passage over the Andes accomplished, it seemed very hard to turn back. The more I reflected, the more my enthusiasm for El Dorado revived, so, with a final spiteful glance at the huge cone, I announced my decision.

"To return is almost as dangerous as to proceed. Therefore, in my opinion, we ought to push on as rapidly as possible, and take our chance of being overwhelmed by another eruption."

"Your opinion coincides with mine," replied Gillett. "Besides, I have noticed that the whole fury of the volcano has been expended on the south side of the mountain, and as our track trends round to its north, we need anticipate no danger or delay from molten lava or road-obliterating boulders. By the bye, what will Chotil say when he sees this bridge?" continued the doctor with a comical smile. "I remember telling him that I could span the gulf by means of enchantments, and I think it will be a wise plan to keep up the fiction by showing him I have done so. The idea that I possess so formidable a power must not be allowed to die out."

"You must be far gone to desire to be so boastful before an ignorant savage," I answered. "Do you not remember that a boaster is an habitual suppressor of the truth?"

" Fairly hit, by Jove !" said the doctor, laughing. " But we must, at all costs, bring the minds of our Indians into complete subjection, so that they will only see through our eyes, and think with our thoughts. Perfect cohesion may prove our salvation in the wilds we are so anxious to reach ; whereas, if it be loosed even by one strand, the expedition may terminate in hideous disaster."

" You are right, as you always are," I replied. " So boast away, and perpetrate as many pious falsehoods as you like, provided they only contribute to the safety and success of our undertaking."

Gillett now sent for Chotil and the Indians, and when they arrived pointed to the rough causeway, saying simply—

" Pillan has granted my request, and sent his artificers out of the crater to build me this bridge."

The astonishment and awe of our followers is indescribable. Their eyes glanced along the pile of rocks to the opposite side, where they saw it continuous with the winding road ; all seemed to fit in so perfectly, that they could not doubt that the Machi had roused the volcano from its sleep to do his bidding. Chotil fell on his face before the doctor and muttered some supplicatory prayer, his example being followed by all the rest.

" Rise, my children," said Gillett, ever ready to improve the occasion. " Be obedient, and I will throw my protection around you, for I am *apo-ulmen*¹ to Pillan, the great *Toqui* of the universe. Of all medicine-men I am the chief ; the *Ampives*, the *Vileus*, and the *Machis* bow down before me.² Follow me, therefore, whithersoever I lead you ; and the fever, the famine, and the weapons of your enemies shall do you no hurt."

" You have soared to heights unknown," I exclaimed,

¹ *Apo-ulmen* corresponds to our idea of an Archangel.

² The Araucanian physicians are divided into three classes—the *Ampives*, or Empirics ; the *Vileus*, or methodical ; and the *Machis*, who cure by spell.

as the Indians retired to bring up the baggage. "I scarcely imagined that you would venture to assert yourself as a spiritual being, nor did I think you would dare to make so extensive a promise as immunity against disease, hunger, and death!"

"The more I elevate myself to the spiritual sphere, so much the more do I ensure a slavish obedience. Besides, considering the chance we have of being made, like Desmonde, into Chalconian gods, it is good practice to accustom one's self to a little worship. It will look as if we had been used to it all our lives."

I shall never forget the amount of downright hard work we got through that day, in our eagerness to cross the magic bridge, as Chotil called it. Hurry was out of the question when we had to haul baggage first and obstinate mules afterwards over rough rocks to the edge of the chasm ; but fortunately we had just completed the task as night fell. We were now on exactly the same spot as we were some fourteen hours ago, when the upheaval of the molten lava drove us terrified away ; and should the mountain become active during the night, the loss of our goods would be certain, and the sacrifice of our lives not improbable. Thus, with feelings the reverse of happy, we lay down that night—not to sleep, but to pray for morning.

The dark hours rolled slowly away in peace, and at daybreak we were feverishly busy with our preparations, casting every now and then an anxious look at our *bête noir*, the volcanic mountain, which, however, was considerate enough to show no further signs of agitation.

By nine o'clock we were all safely mustered on the bridge, and Chotil, with a timorous glance at dread Thegtheg, gave the signal to proceed. The first portion of the journey was as smooth travelling as if we were walking over the pavement of Piccadilly, but the latter half was so rough that it was a terrible trial to the animals. Huge gaps had to be spanned with poles hastily tied together,

and our hearts once palpitated with anxiety as we witnessed a mule, laden amongst other things with priceless quinine, stagger and slip in such a manner that we felt sure it was bound to topple over into the gulf beneath. Happily our fears were not realized, and at last we reached the opposite side without a mishap.

One horrible incident sickened us when we were at about the centre of the causeway. It was the discovery of the dead body of our missing Indian. How it could have got into such a position was most mysterious. All we could see of him was his head, quite uninjured, but with features still distorted by the death agony. His body no doubt was below, completely flattened by the collision of two huge rocks weighing many tons. His remains were found quite a hundred and fifty yards from the spot where he was last seen, and Gillett gave us the only probable solution of how the unfortunate man could have taken such a tremendous flight through the air. He supposed that an enormous granitic boulder, ejected from the crater, struck the opposite side of the chasm close to the Indian with such terrific velocity that it rebounded into the gulf, carrying the wretched man with it. Here it collided with another rock, and the two settled down together with the corpse of the Redskin between them. This explanation was very probable, for only those who have ever witnessed a volcano in eruption can credit the wonderful elasticity which is imparted to ordinarily unyielding substances by the frightful rapidity with which they are expelled from the crater.

Gillett and I were both consumed with secret anxiety as we threaded our way swiftly along the northern slopes of Thegtheg. As for Chotil and his men, they had thrown all care to the winds, having the most perfect confidence in the ability of their Machi to conduct them safely through every danger. Fortunately, the doctor's prediction that we should find the road fairly free proved true, so that we were enabled to travel faster that day than we had ever

done before. We both were indefatigable in stimulating the flagging energies of men and mules, and it was with a great sigh of relief that we took up our quarters for the night quite five miles to the east of the restless mountain. Whilst we were boiling our kettles, it burst forth again in a milder form, and although the earth trembled like an aspen leaf under our feet, we felt that we were secure, and could afford to view the spectacle with feelings more of pleasure than pain.

Our road now conducted us down the eastern slope of the Andes, and although we still encountered many hardships, yet the journey became comparatively uneventful. By degrees we left the inhospitable upper regions behind, and our spirits rose as we once more entered the verdure of a semi-tropical vegetation, and listened again to the sweet music of the animal creation.

We had had more than enough of the pass of Thegtheg, and both Gillett and I registered a vow that nothing short of the direst necessity would ever induce us to tempt its dangerous track again.

I ventured on a mild kind of "chaff" with Chotil, and reminded him that, in spite of Pillan's threats, he had passed through his sacred territory unscathed.

"The Machi made the great Toqui remove his curse," answered the chief. "But had he not been the king of sorcerers, and asked Pillan to divert his wrath to the south, we should never have been able to resume the track, for it would have been buried under the mountain, and we should have been consumed with fire."

As the Indian's argument was unanswerable, I held my peace, but the deference and respect with which he now treated Gillett was most amusing. He hardly ever left his side, and behaved with an abject servility that was truly remarkable in one of his proud and haughty race. He no doubt thought that the Machi was quite as powerful as, if not more so, than great Pillan himself !

CHAPTER VII.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL.

STEADY and continuous marching soon brought us to the fertile eastern plains of Peru, where the beautiful luxuriance of Nature made ample amends for the toil and hardship we had so recently undergone. By means of rafts, we conveyed ourselves and baggage across the river Ucayali, and shortly afterwards plunged into the dense tropical forests of the Amazonian province of Brazil, where we bade a long adieu to civilization and prepared ourselves in stern earnest for the task we had undertaken.

As far as we had yet gone, everything had turned out satisfactorily. Chotil was the pink of perfection both as a leader and as a hunter ; his men had settled down to strict discipline and cheerfully obeyed every order ; our stores of provisions, tinned meats, and quinine, showed signs of holding out two months longer than we had calculated upon ; and, above all, the health of every member of the expedition was excellent.

Both Gillett and I now began to constantly consult Desmonde's precious journal, but it was sufficiently vague to keep us in a chronic state of anxiety and mental tension. Here is one extract as a sample—

“Latitude, 9° South. Seek the river Junarok, where, a mile below its confluence with the swift-rushing Panyan, it plunges into a dark cavern. Fear not to trust thyself herein, for, with the aid of lighted brands, thou wilt be

borne safely by the current to a broad and placid stream whose waters will convey thee to the commencement of the swamps which intervene betwixt thee and Chalco."

Of course, with chronometers and delicate modern instruments, we were enabled to fix our position most accurately, but—and here came one cause for deep anxiety—had Desmonde the means of approaching to a good approximation of the latitude he here fixed upon? If his calculation was simply a rough, rule-of-thumb affair, the rivers we had to discover might baffle all our attempts to reach them by lying too many miles to the north or south of the exact line of latitude.

We were travelling in a most undeviating manner along the ninth parallel in the hope of striking the junction of these two streams, whose names were totally unfamiliar to any of our Indian escort. Every map that could possibly aid us in locating them had been eagerly studied before starting on our enterprise; but as we had been unfortunate enough not to discover therein the slightest trace of their existence, we had resolved to trust to chance information from roving Indians as to their whereabouts.

Undoubtedly this utter uncertainty where to find the very keystone upon which the success of our search depended, would, with most people, be sufficient to stamp the expedition as the folly of two maniacs, and more than once I caught Gillett, or Gillett caught me, wearing a look which, translated into language, bore no other meaning than that we were both a couple of idiotic enthusiasts!

How were we to identify the Junarok and Panyan rivers from the multitude of streams which rushed down from the highlands, and formed junctions and anastomoses as innumerable and perplexing as those of the minute arteries of the human body?

I confess the problem fairly puzzled me, and I openly told the doctor that my only hope was in him, for his anatomical education, which had taught him to cunningly

trace a blood-vessel from its origin to its termination, was bound to be of more service than my classical knowledge in fixing upon and hunting down our two mysterious water channels. But Gillett laughed at the idea, professed to detect an undercurrent of banter in it, and then gravely asserted that there was not the slightest analogy between a branch of the Aorta and a tributary of the Amazon.

Even the wandering tribes, who might have been able to give us the necessary information, were conspicuous by their absence ; though, had we been less desirous of making their acquaintance, they would probably have been round us in hostile shoals. The rule of contraries has too large a share in the government of this world, and this fact was never so strongly impressed on my mind as it was during the weeks we were tramping about seeking for confluent rivers and finding none that would answer our requirements.

But we were not wandering aimlessly about all this time, nor leaving anything to chance, for we had a plan of action which we rigorously adhered to. It consisted in marching five miles every day, and then detaching scouting parties on either flank to explore the neighbourhood north and south of our line of latitude.

Although our impatience frequently found vent in angry expressions at the slow progress we thus made, yet we were more than compensated by the magnificent scenery which surrounded us on all sides. At one time we would be moving through a splendid park-like country, whose grassy undulations had the effect of reminding us of some of the peaceful views of old England ; at another, we were plunged in all the glories of a tropical forest, recognizing, at every step, plants whose use had long become essential to European comfort. Handsome cinchona trees, yellow with a lichenous parasite, enormous tobacco plants gay with their panicles of pink flower-heads, the climbing evergreen sarsaparilla, and the tendril-bearing vanilla, rising to a height of thirty feet and resplendent with its yellow

fruit, all extorted our admiration and afforded us supreme pleasure at seeing them grow, for the first time, in their native forests. The Indians also pointed out a substance which they termed "sourcane," and asserted it to be as efficacious as quinine in curing intermittent fevers, but I could gather no further information on this point from the doctor, who, for a wonder, had to confess that here his vast stock of knowledge failed him. Our Indians initiated us into another novelty in the way of fishing, and this was important as it enabled us to husband our diminishing store of provisions. Their method was to use the root of a plant called barbasco, which had the extraordinary effect of operating as a narcotic on any of the piscine species who were foolish enough to swallow it. As the root seemed to be much appreciated by the finny tribes, they fell into our meshes by shoals, and thus ensured us a plentiful supply of fresh food, and formed an agreeable change to the flesh which was procured by our guns. All fear of starvation was thus staved off for the present, but we felt that great precautions were necessary, inasmuch as when we turned away from our store-houses, the rivers, and plunged into swamps whose extent and capacity for supporting life was unknown, we might find ourselves destitute in a desolate region incapable of supplying us with the least sustenance.

We had been wandering about for more than a week in a thick, tangled, tropical forest, where, at every few yards, we had to literally hew a passage for our baggage-mules, when, to our great relief, we again came to an open, park-like country, and perceived on the horizon that the ground rose up into a series of conical hills similar to those so common in South Africa. We soon fell in with a river running due east, and directed our course by its side. The ground was so delightfully free from encumbrances that we quickly accomplished the regulation five miles, sent our scouts to examine the locality, and on their return with no report, lunched and started afresh. After marching some

distance the road became less easy, for large stones and boulders began to usurp the place of vegetation, and the river banks rose higher and higher until they formed veritable precipices with the water roaring some two hundred feet below. The work now began to get so tedious that we thought it advisable to call a halt to regain breath and survey the scene around us, which to the north presented a dreary aspect of hill and stone unredeemed by any verdure.

Away to the south, the wilderness continued as far as the northern bank of a broad stream, whose waters were sparkling and flashing in the brilliant sunlight; then the lovely tropical vegetation began again, and reached the base of a chain of mountains running from north-west to south-east. As we traced the flow of this shining river, we noticed that it united its waters with those of the one on whose banks we were standing. Still further eastward, the flash of the confluent streams was lost in the dark shadow of the mountains before mentioned, which seemed to stand there as effectual barriers to its onward progress.

I stood in a musing attitude, dreamily admiring the splendid panorama, when Gillett startled me by the insane abruptness with which he jumped at least five feet into the air, pouring out, at the same time, a volley of incoherent exclamations.

"Has a rattle-snake bitten you?" I asked, surveying the doctor's flushed face and wild eyes with astonishment.

"We began to think we were idiots, didn't we, for starting on this wild-goose chase?" he exclaimed. "You have not told me as much in so many words, but I read your glances and fathomed your unspoken thoughts, and knew that they meant, 'Gillett, you are an idiot, and have made me one by inoculating me with your mad El Doradian enthusiasm. But for you, I should be well out of this and on my way home to England.' Don't contradict me," he continued, as he saw I was about to make an observa-

tion. "I know your belief in Chaleo has been on the wane on account of the apparent impossibility of finding the two rivers of Desmonde ; but what would you say if I told you that they were at last discovered ?"

"Don't be an idiot !" I answered testily.

"I won't !" replied the doctor calmly. "I will speak as soberly and reasonably as if I were addressing the President and Fellows of the College of Physicians. Know then, that by careful observation, backed up by many facts, I have formed a very logical conclusion that we are at this moment standing on the south bank of the Junarok river !"

"Do be sensible !" I ejaculated.

"Your surname ought to be Didymus !" responded Gillett ironically. "But come with me a little higher up this rock, and I will give you ocular demonstration of the fact. There now, look to the south, and follow that stream, the Panyan, flowing towards us and then turning east to pour its waters into the one we are overlooking. Further on, your field-glasses will reveal that the river plunges into a huge cavern beneath those mountains yonder !"

I took a long and anxious look in the direction indicated, and then a flood of light illumined my mind. Without doubt I was gazing on a sight I had been ardently longing to see, and the truth of Gillett's discovery was so clear and patent that I almost felt inclined to be angry with myself for being so short-sighted as not to have taken in the situation at the first glance.

"We have another four hours' daylight, so let us push on !" was my exclamation as I closed the glasses.

Gillett understood from the suppressed excitement of my speech, that any further conversation was out of the question. He therefore went back, and let off some of his superfluous energy by urging the Indians to use the utmost expedition in resuming the journey. By the time the mules had commenced to move, my emotional condition had nearly worn off, and left in its place an intense eager-

ness to camp by the side of the cavern before nightfall, should the river prove fordable.

The possibility of getting our baggage safely over the stream soon became a point which caused some anxiety, for we noticed from where we were that the current was extremely rapid, and that at the place of confluence a deep and vicious-looking whirlpool eddied ominously around. In vain we searched for a path that would lead us downward to the north bank of the Junarok. Gillett, Chotil, and I reconnoitred up to the very edge of the spit of land which projected over the whirlpool, without discovering any track practicable for our four-footed beasts of burden. We seemed fairly entrapped on the heights between two rivers, and our only chance of ever getting to their level was by retracing ten miles of the route and then striking south until we reached the Panyan in a more favourable locality.

I suggested this as being better than wasting any more time in such a stony wilderness, and Gillett reluctantly assented to it as being the only feasible plan. On informing Chotil of our decision, he negatived it by a most emphatic shake of his head.

"No, no," he said. "I have a better plan. I propose, as the mules will be useless when we reach the cavern, to turn them adrift at once, lower the packages over the cliffs with ropes, and then follow after them in the same fashion."

Anything was better than going back, so we unanimously agreed to carry out Chotil's scheme, and willing hands soon unloaded the mules, who, poor creatures, did not seem to understand that they were free, for they haunted the spot a long time after we had all descended the cliff.

As we stood on the shore, surrounded by our *impedimenta*, another and more serious difficulty presented itself. The rapidity of the stream was so great that not even the strongest swimmer could cross it with safety, while the rocky ground we were on did not grow a single tree out

of which a raft or canoe could be constructed. It was tantalizing to see the well-wooded forest on the opposite side, while here we were racking our brains to devise some means of transit.

"I must try to swim across," at last exclaimed the doctor angrily. "With a rope I might be able to manage it, and once over, I could chop down a tree which you could haul in to your side."

"You shall not undertake such a dangerous task with my consent," I answered decidedly. "Anyhow, we can wait until the morning before thinking of jeopardizing any one's life."

"Very well," said Gillett moodily, and he strolled off on a tour of inspection.

I threw myself savagely down on the loose quartz which composed the shore, and gave myself up to bitter indignation. It was pretty evident that some of the party would have to go back several miles to build a boat. But what a woful waste of time this would involve! Even Nature conspired to preserve her golden El Dorado from the prying eye and the greed of the European, and the difficulties which beset us at almost every turn were sufficient explanations of the failure of the many previous explorations. Thus I bitterly mused for over half an hour, when I perceived the lynx-eyed doctor advancing with—oh, insult of insults!—a beaming smile overspreading his face.

"This is no laughing matter," I exclaimed, with intense annoyance. "I begin to believe that the Evil One has set a special guard over Chalco!"

"Don't get superstitious; it does not become a man of your liberal education," said Gillett, whose features expanded into a still more irritating grin than before.

"Don't try to be sarcastic," I retorted. "And if you should be meditating an attempt to irritate Chotil as well as me, just send him up here with a bottle of Bass before you begin, for I am parched with thirst and vexation."

"Then be vexed no more, for I fancy I have solved the difficulty of crossing the Panyan!"

I threw off my discontent and jumped up eagerly.

"How have you done it?" I inquired.

"By securing a stump of a tree. Chotil lassoed it as it was being whirled down, and I think it will just serve to act as a safeguard betwixt myself and any inquisitive alligator. As we have still nearly two hours before dark, I intend to make a trial trip as soon as the chief has arranged a pole for an oar, and affixed a sufficient length of rope to reach to the opposite bank."

Ten minutes later Gillett stood on his log, and pushed off from the shore, amidst universal applause. He had a hard struggle with the current, and it took him half an hour to reach his goal, which he did without any mishap. By a contrivance known as an endless rope, we were enabled to haul the boat back to our side, embark another passenger and work him over, this process being continued until we all stood on the south side of the Panyan.

The baggage could not be left to the mercy of wild animals, so without a moment's delay we commenced tree felling, and our axes rang merrily in the wood, and our voices encouraged one another to strenuous exertion. A rough raft was soon completed, and the precious goods gradually arrived on our side of the stream, although the last journey was made in the darkness, illumined but scantily by the light of a few lanterns.

Although my wish to encamp that night alongside the cavern was not fulfilled, yet I turned in to sleep with a very satisfactory feeling that I was only a quarter of a mile from it, and, after all, that Nature could not build such insuperable obstacles which the skill and ingenuity of man could not overcome.

The next morning we were up betimes, and wandered along the bank until we arrived at the spot where the stream plunged into a lofty cavern worn out of the porphy-

ritic mountain. A simultaneous shudder agitated us as we watched the swift current, sparkling with bright sunlight, suddenly turn to a gloomy blackness as it passed through the portals of the dark and tomb-like excavation. Such a change from brilliancy to gloom, typical of the fate of this mortal life, oppressed us with a horror we could not shake off, for the journey we were about to undertake bore a great deal of similitude to that final one which, in the days of antiquity, necessitated the passage of the river Styx.

We returned to camp, and issued orders for the building of three canoes, each capable of holding eight men with the proper complement of baggage. Gillett incidentally told Chotil that a short part of the voyage would have to be spent in the subterranean river. The Indians are capital boat-builders, and they worked away steadily until dinner-time, when they had an interval for talking and exchanging ideas. The upshot of this was, that they became mutinous and resolutely refused to let their work contribute towards taking them to Hades before their allotted period. This was an opportunity for the Machi to show his power, which had been in abeyance lately for want of any just cause for its exercise. He treated the assembled multitude to an harangue, which, being duly translated by Chotil, brought them back to their allegiance. The doctor offered them the alternative of following him to fortune or of being destroyed by enchantments if they persisted in mutiny or desertion. So thoroughly was his reputation established, that they one and all submissively chose the former course. After this we had no more trouble, and the men worked steadily on until we launched three very creditable boats, each of which was under the command respectively of Gillett, Chotil, and myself. As we still entertained a certain amount of doubt as to the strength of the chief's nerves under trying circumstances, we arranged that the doctor's canoe should take the lead,

followed by that of Chotil, whilst I brought up the rear. By this means we hoped to hem him in so that, even if a panic seized him, he would be powerless to turn back and flee. This was not a useless precaution, for we were familiar with an Indian saying that "Man should avoid places which are lightened neither by the sun nor the moon," and we were also acquainted with the prevalent belief that the souls of their ancestors inhabited the deep recesses of dark caverns. To the Indian mind, we were about to perpetrate almost an act of sacrilege, and nothing but the supreme confidence they placed in the white Machi's supernatural powers could ever have induced them to trust themselves on the Stygian river. As another means towards producing calmness, we constructed excellent torches from a resinous wood which grew around in plenty, and we intended to light such a number of these as to scare away the intense fear that might arise from the thick gloom we should have to penetrate.

All preparations being completed, Gillett treated the men to a final emphatic warning, saw them in their proper places, and then gave the signal to push off into mid-stream. With a hoarse shout intended for a cheer, we took up our paddles, and the flotilla was under weigh, and gliding towards the dark portals which would admit us to an unknown region. Torches were now lighted, and, five minutes after, Gillett's boat disappeared beneath the overhanging cliff.

My sensations were not pleasant as we suddenly exchanged the bright sunshine for the damp, unwholesome gloom of the cavern, although it was rendered fantastic beyond conception by the numerous torches we were burning. My morbid feelings were made more uncanny by hearing a rapid rush of wings overhead, accompanied by a series of dismal shrieks. For the moment I was thoroughly startled, but then I called to remembrance that these subterranean places were the chosen abodes of nocturnal

birds, who were probably just as much frightened as I was by such an unwonted intrusion.

The Indians behaved very well. Having once worked them up to the proper pitch of endurance, they took everything with the utmost stolidity, and I began to believe that not even the appearance of a real ghost would now upset their mental equilibrium, or shake their faith in Gillett's power to bring them safely through any peril. We progressed silently for two hours, but only a little faster than the current took us, for we were not so much bent upon rowing as upon avoiding a collision with the sides of the cavern, which were now perceptibly approximating. Judging by the strength of the current, which was running at the rate of four miles an hour, I calculated we had already travelled nine miles through this subterranean waterway, whose roof formed the base of huge mountains over which we should have had to force our way but for the existence of this short and easy mode of transit.

I had barely finished my calculation, when I noticed that we seemed to shoot by the walls of the cavern with a considerable increase of rapidity, evidently due to a greater strength of current. At the same time, a dull roaring sound was faintly perceptible, but it quickly swelled to such volume, that I began to fear we were approaching a cataract, which might conduct us somewhat deeper into the interior of the earth than we ever intended. The roar of falling water soon became deafening, and the Indians in my boat showed symptoms of alarm, which I curbed most contemptuously, although I began secretly to lament that the volcano had spared my life solely to lose it in this dark stifling cavern in the very bowels of the earth !

Gillett did not seem to pay much attention to the warning sounds, for his boat still dashed on with ever increasing speed. His conduct was so inexplicable in face of an obvious danger a very short distance ahead, that I shouted

to him to stop. Whether he understood me I knew not, but he called out something in response, and still continued his mad career.

My attention was distracted from Gillett by the increasing terror of my boatmen, whose superstition threatened to get the upper hand of their belief in the Machi. I was using my best endeavours to assuage their fears, when Gillett again called to me. His words were inaudible, but the tones were so cheerful that I was utterly unprepared for the wild, ringing cry of alarm which immediately followed. I guessed what had happened, so directing my men to back water as hard as they could, stood up just in time to see the front torches disappearing wildly down an abyss. The awful sight was only momentary, and in another second they were gone for ever.

How can I picture the agony which entered into my soul as my best and only friend vanished so suddenly into the dark and seething waters! If I had to live my life over again, I do not think it possible that I could ever experience such an absolute misery as that which was now prostrating me. I felt that grief would soon render me useless, and, as I had a duty to perform to the living, I set about it at once by ordering the Indians to fasten the boat up securely to the sides. Chotil, who was only a couple of lengths ahead, had already done the same, so here we were, fifteen men all told, huddled together in two hollow trees, with a fearful cataract in front and pitchy darkness and a swift stream behind.

It was a position fraught with appalling terror and danger, yet I was utterly indifferent to it all, and I could recognize, feel, or appreciate only one solemn fact—that Gillett, the genial doctor, the best of friends, was gone from me for ever. I laid myself back in the canoe in such perceptible grief that I drew the attention of the Indians upon me; but as they looked, I saw their stolid faces soften, and kindly expressions of sympathy flit over them.

Suddenly, the utter cowardice of this inaction flashed into my mind, as a vision of Gillett, making an awful descent over the precipice to save my life on two occasions, arose before me. He, the self-sacrificing friend, had not hesitated an instant in imperilling himself for me; yet here was I supinely and pusillanimously letting the precious moments fly, until perhaps it might be too late to render any effectual assistance.

Stung to the quick by my self-reproaches, I arose, shook off the lethargic misery, and ordered Chotil to bring his boat into a position which would enable me to step into it. This being done, I informed him that I should require his assistance in manœuvring up to the very edge of the abyss, but, with a cry of terror, he besought me not to attempt it.

"Machi Gillett has gone to join his great ancestors in the land of shades," he argued. "Of what use therefore is it to tempt Pillan to destroy us also? Rather let us turn back, and get once more to the world and sunshine."

"I am going to seek the Machi," I answered with stern determination. "I therefore order you to assist me, and if you refuse, beware of enchantments which will reduce you to poverty, and make you the laughing-stock of your tribe."

But I had neither the power nor influence of Gillett over this man. He hesitated, and then poured out a pitiful tale of superstitious terror, winding up with a request that I would not insist upon his accompanying me.

"There is no time to bandy words," was my reply. "If you are afraid, go back. I will not have a coward with me."

He fairly writhed under the taunt, and for a moment seemed so undecided that I hoped he might yet repent. But his abject fear of the supernatural was too strong for him, and with a yell of anger and humiliation, he sprang into the other boat, his example being followed by the rest of the crew.

Thus was I, when I most needed help, deserted by every one. I could wring but one concession from them, that they would await my reappearance for at least six hours. Chotil swore this solemnly, invoking the *manes* of his ancestors to bear witness to his sincerity. Somewhat relieved at feeling that, if I saved my life, I should not have to work my way back alone through this funereal tunnel, I began to make the needful preparations for exploring the dreaded abyss.

CHAPTER VIII.

TEOTL OR OSIRIS?

IF there is one thing more calculated than another to urge a man on to desperate deeds, it is the sense of having to perform them under the eyes of persons whom he has stigmatized as cowards for their refusal to help him.

As Chotil and his followers sprang out of the boat, I set my teeth hard, and vowed that my exploration should be so thorough that I would go, if necessary, to the very bottom of the rush of waters, and court the fate which, I had every reason to believe, had overtaken my poor friend. Anxiety, fear, or the smallest thought of self-preservation, ceased to exist in my heart, and I was only conscious of a strong, burning determination to follow the doctor along the watery path he had traversed, and to find him somewhere, even if the quest led me through the great portals of death into the realms of the Infinite. Never had I—a man of many acquaintances and few friends—so keenly felt the force of true affection until Gillett was snatched from me. It was only now that I realized how empty the world would be, how useless all my riches, if my one true friend had gone whither I could not follow.

Urged on by the overpowering force of this supremest emotion of human nature, I quickly set about splicing together a number of ropes, until I obtained a length of more than a hundred feet. In this task I was assisted by

the Indians, whose trembling fingers worked more nimbly than mine. When all was ready, I unfastened the stern rope of my boat, and allowed the current to swing it round, thus bringing it nearer to the falls by its own length. Fortunately, the width of the tunnel at this place permitted me to repeat the manœuvre several times, until I had the satisfaction of feeling that I had safely arrived to within ten feet of the brink. The force of the stream was here so great, and put such an enormous tension on the painter, that I began to fear it would give way, and hurl me to the bottom of the abyss before I could fix my life-saving apparatus to a jutting-out piece of rock which I saw a few feet from the head of the waterfall. Whilst I was attaching a lighted lantern to the end of the long rope, its rays, shining on the sides of the cavern, revealed a series of rough projections which, though small and slippery, might enable me to walk along to the very verge of the abyss. Without pausing to think of the certain death which would result from one false step, I scrambled out of the canoe, and cautiously groped my way until I stood right over the cataract, and affixed the rope a few paces nearer than I had hoped for.

Having accomplished this without accident, I now ventured to turn my eyes on to the tumultuous mass of water which went roaring down to unknown, awful depths! I had, hitherto, purposely refrained from doing this until the rope was secure, for I dreaded the giddiness and the fatal consequences which so often accompany the act of looking down from a vast height.

As I gazed, I rubbed my eyes to make sure I was not dreaming. At the second glance, I laughed aloud so merrily that I forgot the smallness of my perch, and very narrowly escaped taking a plunge into the cascade of foam beneath. The dreaded abyss leading to the centre of the earth was no abyss at all, but an innocent sheet of water having a fall of about eight feet—a fall which an Indian

thought nothing of shooting in his canoe. In addition to this, I noted with eminent satisfaction that daylight's blessed radiance diffused itself at no great distance.

Here we were, then, at the end of our lugubrious journey, and I felt convinced that the doctor and his crew had safely shot the rapids, and were now probably wondering at our delay in following. I anathematized vigorously that rascal Chotil, and vowed, in the joy of my heart, that Gillett should make him repent of his cowardice by some practical application of his magical art to the chief's body.

As the Indians might still hesitate to follow me unless I carried back to them some information concerning the remainder of the dark passage, I determined to measure the space which intervened between me and the outside world, and this I accordingly did by lowering the lantern and allowing the stream to carry it away. When about eighty feet of rope had been paid out, I discovered that the free end had become hitched up into something. My struggles to set it loose only resulted in fixing it more firmly, and several minutes elapsed before I succeeded in withdrawing it. Anxious to see whether the lantern was intact, I hauled in the rope, and, to my great astonishment, perceived a scrap of paper wound round the reflector. This is what it said—

“Do not hesitate to put your boats at the fall. We are all safe, and cannot understand the meaning of your delay.—A. GILLETT.”

“Thank God!” was my fervent ejaculation, as I crept back from ledge to ledge, and regained the boat in safety. “The great conspiracy of Nature to guard El Dorado will yet be baffled by the intrepid Gillett, who evidently was not born to be drowned.”

It would be useless to attempt to shout my discoveries to the Indians, for the din of the water falling in a narrow cavern utterly silenced the voice, and I was therefore

obliged to work back against the powerful current to where I had left them. So far they had kept their word, for there they were, crowded up most uncomfortably in the remaining canoe.

I held the doctor's note before Chotil, exclaiming, "The Machi has sent you a message, bidding you to go after him immediately, under pain of being turned into stone."

"Can the Machi's spells work from the land of shades?" asked the chief in great consternation.

"Of course they can," I replied. "But as he is still alive and waiting for you a very short distance off, I advise you to make haste."

In a few more words I quieted his superstition, and told him that after passing the miniature rapid, he would find himself in daylight, and in the presence of Gillett. When he became convinced that he had nothing to fear, he harangued his countrymen, and raised them from deep despondency to joyful hope, so that they were all eager to loosen the boats and hasten to the brightness and warmth of the upper world.

My canoe was soon manned with its proper crew, and in a few minutes we swept, with a mighty rush, over the falls. Almost before I had time to feel nervous, we had glided into smooth water in a cleft whose two sides towered up to a vast height above our heads. An instant after, we shot out from beneath the shadow of the mountain into a bright and sparkling sunshine, almost too dazzling for our blinded eyes.

"Out oars and pull in to the right bank," exclaimed a welcome voice, which I recognized as Gillett's.

We obeyed his instructions, and, although we were winking and blinking like owls, soon found ourselves alongside the high and shelving shore. The last boat arrived after a tedious delay, and, when Chotil landed, he was so crest-fallen that he feigned to be too busily occupied to have time to notice us.

"Whatever was the cause of your wishing to stay so long in that dismal tunnel?" asked Gillett, as soon as he had an opportunity of talking to me. "I thought at least that your boats had upset, or the Indians had mutinied."

"I think I had sufficient reason for staying behind when I saw your canoe vanishing, and heard your shout and an Indian yell!"

"I shouted 'Come on,' and directed my crew to do the same, to make sure that you should understand," answered the doctor.

"Understand!" I ejaculated. "How could I imagine the cataract would prove so harmless, when I did not even know that we had to encounter such a thing?"

"I called out quite enough to reassure you on that point," said Gillett.

"Ah! Now I remember hearing your voice, but the roar of the cascade obscured every word you said."

"Then that accounts for your cautious movements after we disappeared," said Gillett. "As a matter of fact, I was as ignorant as you of the existence of the fall, until we were almost within sound of it. By good luck, having nothing better to do, and having a lantern by my side, I pulled out Desmonde's journal, and began to read his notes concerning this part of the journey. I then noticed, for the first time, some faint writing in the margin of one of the leaves, and by the aid of a lens from my field-glass made out the words, 'A waterfall of four feet terminates the subterranean voyage.' The rushing sound in the distance, which commenced to grow louder, emphasized the words as I read them, so I explained the situation to my Indians, and then shouted to you, but, as it turned out, with no effect."

"There is some discrepancy between Desmonde's estimate of the depth of the fall, and our experience of it," I remarked.

"You must bear in mind that two hundred years have

elapsed since he wrote his description," answered Gillett. "A continual dropping will wear away the hardest stone, as it has done in this case. Indeed we ought to consider ourselves extremely fortunate in having found the channel pervious, for Nature, in one of her mad freaks, might have hurled down vast masses of rock and effectually obliterated the passage."

"Well, thank God we have got through it so safely," I replied. "The remembrance of that tunnel, and the sight of your boat vanishing down what I thought was a fathomless abyss, will haunt me to my dying day! There, old fellow," I continued, seizing my friend's hand, "I cannot express the delight I feel at being able to see you and talk to you, after I had given you up for ever."

"Let us change the subject, or you will get a fit of the 'blues,'" said Gillett brusquely, for he did not want his soft heart to be upset by a conversation which threatened to drift rapidly into the sentimental. "Your lunch in the dark probably did not agree with you."

"No," I answered promptly. "It gave me an attack of mental indigestion!"

The week that followed our successful passage through the Stygian river was one of delightful ease and comfort, and contributed much towards building up our strength, and fortifying us against the inroads of those unseen enemies who would attack us in force as we passed over the fever swamps. We floated lazily down the stream, enjoying the magnificent scenery, and listening to the cries of the wild animals who abounded in the dense forests which fringed either bank of the river. The jaguar and the ocelot frequently made night hideous by their cries, but during the day-time our smooth gliding through the water was enlivened by troops of monkeys, who swung themselves from tree to tree and kept up with our boats for miles, jabbering and gesticulating at us with most comical energy. Evidently the sight of man was new to them, or else, as

Gillett satirically observed, they were welcoming most effusively their first cousins !

It was during this part of the journey that we began to instruct our followers in the use of their new firearms. They had exhibited such docility and firm faith in their Machi, and, moreover, were so keen to enter the land of gold, that we considered the time had arrived to convert them from an undisciplined band to a body of men capable of dealing effectually with a force ten times their number. Every morning, therefore, before we embarked, we gave them an hour's rifle practice, and their quick, trained eyes soon enabled them to become very fair marksmen. Not one exhibited the least awkwardness in handling his weapon, and we had the satisfaction of feeling that, by the time we entered Chalco, we should have a splendidly-trained body of dead shots for our protection.

At the end of the week, the banks of the river began to assume a different character. At first they were very steep and precipitous ; then they gradually dwindled down until the forest foliage was only four or five feet above us ; and now they became so low as to be scarcely above the level of the surface of the water. It was at this point that we commenced a sharp look-out for a sign-post, which, the journal informed us, was an ancient and barbarous piece of sculpture placed there for the guidance of any of the Atlicaligui who were hurrying from foreign oppression to the haven of rest prepared by their brethren in Chalco. In order not to pass it, we travelled very slowly, with eyes keenly surveying every object that bore the minutest resemblance to a hewn stone.

We had now got, unmistakably, into the swampy lowlands, impregnated with intermittent fever, and Gillett, for precaution's sake, forbade our landing after dusk, and ordered us to take our sleep in the canoes. This, though it was terribly crampy work, was no doubt the means of preserving us all in first-rate health.

Sunday was a day which we religiously observed as a day of rest, and on this particular Sabbath, after a timid plunge in the river infested with alligators, we took our guns, being under the necessity of providing breakfast, and landed on the low, reedy shore. Although the sun was not yet fully up, a warm steam was exhaling from the ground, and the whole atmosphere was pervaded with a stifling moisture.

"This sort of thing will soon give me prickly heat," I exclaimed. "I had quite enough of it in the Red Sea to care to undergo a repetition of it here. Ugh! it is the most miserable, depressing ailment which flesh is heir to."

"Prickly heat is one of the smallest evils which this vapour portends," said the doctor, looking very grave. "Unless I am very much mistaken, this atmosphere contains the germs of intermittent, remittent, and continued fevers in a concentrated form. The very smell of the air is suggestive of typhoid, yellow fever, and ague, and I sincerely hope we shall not have to spend more than a few days in traversing this awful region, otherwise I will not answer for the lives of any of us."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," I answered, impressed by the gravity of Gillett's tones. "We must put a bold face on the matter, and, above all, keep our knowledge away from the Indians. Treble your quinine parades, and tell Chotil that as we are so near the demigods of Chalco, you must treble his dose of the medicine of strength and courage."

"You are right," replied Gillett. "Quinine is our sheet-anchor. Nothing else can prevent the whole party being stricken down and blotted out."

"Well, it is nauseous enough to frighten away the biggest army of microbes that ever attempted to invade man's interior organization," I answered; and just as I spoke, I caught sight of a large bird with crimson and gold plumage.

"Fire, Gillett!" I shouted. "I can't, for my gun is entangled in this tough creeper."

The doctor did not wait for a second invitation. Down came the bird, and his slayer immediately started through the thickly tangled undergrowth to pick it up. But it was no easy matter to find it without a dog, and the doctor went on searching for some time, whilst I lazily looked out on the river.

Presently a prolonged whistle, followed immediately by a cry of astonishment, aroused my attention. Then a shout of "Wrenforth, come here quickly!" put me into rapid movement, and I hastily pushed through the reeds, and caught sight of Gillett standing in front of a large block of stone. With an intuitive feeling that this would turn out to be our eagerly-sought-after sign-post, I finished the remaining distance at a bound, and stood by the doctor's side.

"What an extraordinary piece of carving!" I exclaimed, after contemplating it for some minutes. "Is it a god of the Incas?"

"I think not," replied Gillett. "It resembles no Peruvian deity I have yet come across. The conical head-dress with a feather on each side is a costume unknown to that ancient people."

"How brilliantly the colours of the necklace stand out," was my next remark. "It seems to have been painted only yesterday. Then, again, see what he holds in his hands—in one, a kind of pastoral staff, in the other a flail. Perhaps it is a Mexican idol, Teotl or Quetzalcoatl, or one of those gentry with unpronounceable names?"

The doctor evidently regarded the suggestion as affording food for reflection, for he stood again attentively regarding the sculpture. After five minutes' exhaustive study, he shook his head despondently.

"No, Wrenforth; that theory will not hold water, for the features bear no likeness to the American Indian type; if anything, they seem to be rather Asiatic in character."

I stared at it again for some time, and at last a light dawned upon me.

"I have it!" I cried. "What dolts we are to puzzle our brains over a figure we have seen many times before! Do you not remember our explorations at Thebes, the 'city with a hundred gates,' as Homer called it? Can you not call to mind our awe and wonderment at seeing a colossal representation of Osiris, one of the dread Egyptian trinity? Well, we have him here, in this swamp, on a smaller scale."

"By Jove, you are right!" exclaimed Gillett excitedly. "And I will very soon prove the truth of your assertion."

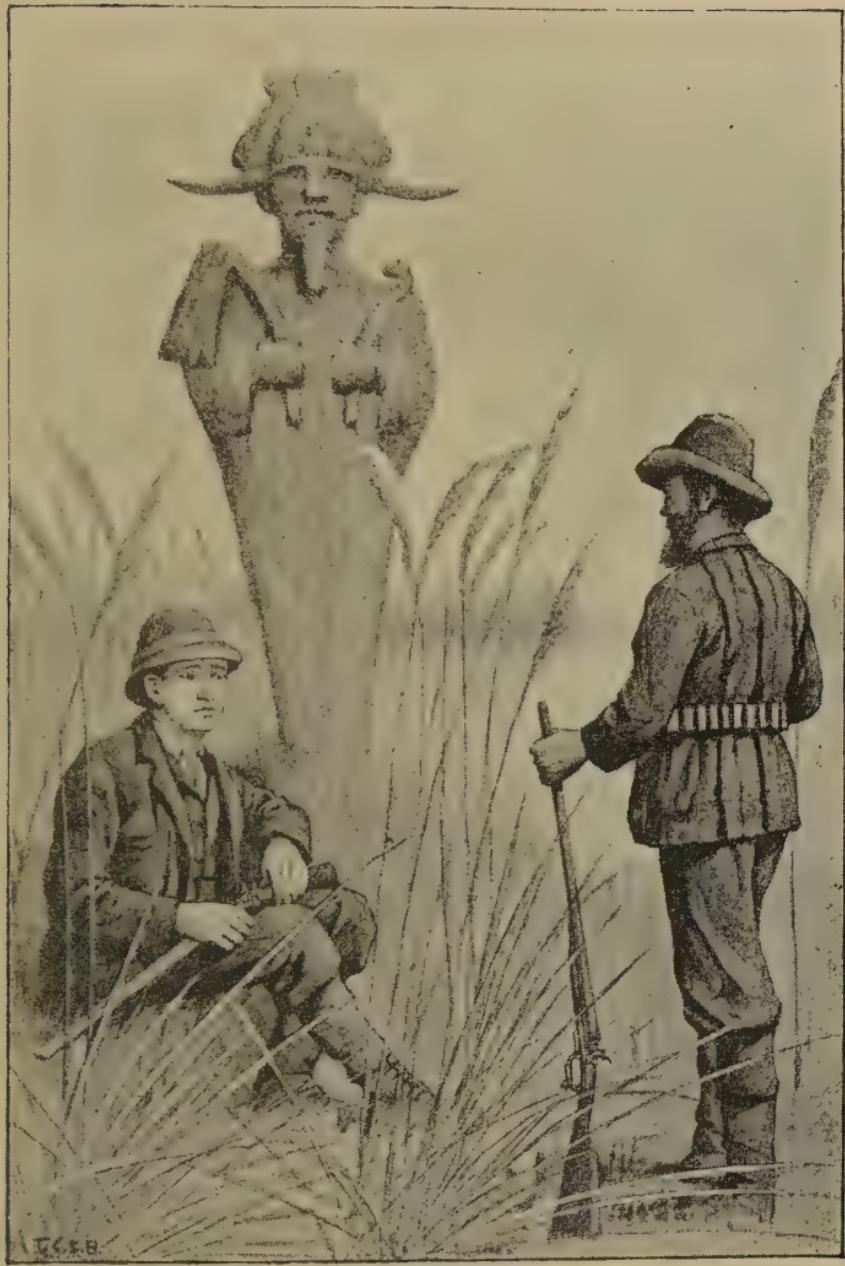
With that he commenced a minute examination of the carving, and, beneath an incrustation of lichens, soon brought to light the *cartouche* of Osiris! There could be no doubt now of the fact, that we had discovered a relic of the highest Egyptian antiquity in the untrodden forest of South America. The conical headpiece which puzzled us was the white crown of Upper Egypt, bearing an ostrich feather on each side—thoroughly typical of the god of ancient Chemi.

"Beyond exception this is the most extraordinary find we have yet made in the whole course of our travels!" was my first exclamation when my excitement had cooled down. "But how could this huge slab have been transported to these wilds?"

"It is a conundrum beyond my knowledge to unravel," said Gillett. "The sculpture belongs to the oldest period of the Old World, and how it came to set itself up in the very heart of the New Continent is a mystery too deep to solve, unless—— Yet I hardly dare put the thought into words."

"Any conjecture, even the wildest, is better than none," I replied. "So let me hear quickly your interpretation of the mystical phenomenon, as I am all impatience for some explanation."

"Then I will hazard one," said the doctor, "and you may take it for what it is worth. A few years ago, after



"By Jove, you are right!" exclaimed Gillett excitedly.—*p. 120.*

passing one of my professional examinations, I took up the study of the ancient Aztec civilization as an agreeable relaxation to a brain overcrowded with dry bones and anatomy. Amongst the works I read was Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico*, and from it I learned that the magnificent pyramids scattered throughout the country were not built by the Aztecs, nor even by their predecessors, the Toltecs, but by a race called Olmecs, whose history, like that of the Titans, is lost in the mists of fable. This highly-civilized nation, 'powerful, populous, and well advanced in refinement, as attested by their monuments, has perished without a name. It has died, and made no sign.' Tradition points to their Asiatic origin, and their architectural remains bear a close similarity to those of Egypt. Hence, with this representation of Osiris obtruding itself upon our astonished gaze in a place which we fondly imagined had never been pressed by civilized man, I am forced to the conclusion that the vanished race of Olmec was originally an Egyptian colony, and that irruptions of barbarous tribes drove them to retreat from Mexico to a safer asylum across the isthmus of Panama into South America."

"Your conjecture is a very wild one," I said. "It is founded entirely upon the discovery of a graven image in a situation hundreds of miles away from Mexico."

"But remember this," argued Gillett. "The Egyptian figure is placed on the route to Chalco for the express purpose of directing fugitive Atlicaligui to a safe haven. Desmonde distinctly states this in his diary."

"Who, then, were the Atlicaligui?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly a tribe of the lost nation of Olmec," replied Gillett. "When the Aztecs burst over the fertile plains of Mexico, and, like our own Goths and Vandals, threatened to overwhelm civilization with barbarism, the Olmec race forsook the land and endeavoured to found another colony far removed from the desolating influence of their conquerors. This they succeeded in doing, and I

have a strong idea that, in the inhabitants of Chalco, we shall find means of identifying the lost race, and perhaps of tracing back their ancestry to the highly-cultivated worshippers of Isis, Horus, and Osiris."

"I am very much inclined to agree with you," I answered. "Your argument is ingenious if not quite correct. However, I am afraid the learned *savants* at home would laugh it to scorn."

"But they could not controvert that hard and stony fact," said Gillett, striking the figure as he spoke. "This undoubted relic of the land of Cham could not have dropped from the clouds, nor have been transported here by a whirlwind. Somebody must have brought it, or must have sculptured it here on the spot. Anyhow, I consider that we have the fullest evidence for believing that a skilled Egyptian artificer has visited this place, and left behind him the marks of his skill. But if one of his race has wandered so far away from his beloved Nile, it seems a foregone conclusion that he did not come unaccompanied—that is, that a host of Pharaoh's subjects have, at some time or another, marched along the path we are about to follow. Let the *savants* sneer as they please, but I intend to adhere to this theory, utterly regardless of the scathing criticisms such rashness may call down upon my devoted head."

"It is fortunate that there is not one here, or he would have a *mauvais quart d'heure*," I exclaimed, with a burst of laughter at the doctor's indignant wind-up. "But let us pass from that point and consult our Desmonde as to our future proceedings. Hitherto he has proved a true oracle, and may he still continue to guide us aright."

Gillett produced the precious journal and read the following:—

"Having discovered the quaint carving in stone, which the chief priest of the royal tribe tells me is an image of his god, you must make a journey of twenty-five English

miles in a straight line due south, when, by diligent observation, you will set your eyes upon three small mounds of quartz, the highest being not more than four ells. From this point you must shape your course to the east, and in another two days' march you will arrive on the banks of the river, which having crossed, you will be in the territory of the Atlicaligui. One caution will I give thee, O bold adventurer. Beware of the venomous things that infest this loathsome swamp. Linger not by the wayside, or the pestilence will smite thee; distrust an apparently dead limb of a tree should you see the least gleam of colour upon it, for thus does the awful culebra snake disguise himself as he lies in wait for the unwary; pray against the fire-spirits who roam over the marshes at night, seeking to entrap men into their toils and destroy their sinful souls!"

"There speaks mediæval superstition!" I exclaimed, as Gillett closed the book. "Even in the Caroline era, the educated European was a devout believer in ghosts, witches, warlocks, and imps of Satan, who all possessed special means for worrying mankind. I remember once wading through an elaborate treatise on witches, written by a Dr. Glanville, who was chaplain to Charles II., but I confess his reverence failed either to convince or interest me."

"Nevertheless, Desmonde has given us good, wholesome caution against the wiles of the boa-constrictor," said Gillett. "As we wade through the steamy swamp, I shall take particular care that every man has his knife and gun handy, for fear of accidents. But I am getting an excellent appetite for breakfast, and as this ancient sign-post has prevented our intended massacre of the snipe, we must open our meat-tins to feed the hungry Indians; and if your bird is pronounced by Chotil to be worth expending his culinary art upon, we will divide it between us. Now let us embark, for we have found the appetite, and may good digestion wait upon it!"

We were heartily glad to be once more on the broad bosom of the river, and away from the stifling atmosphere of the marshes. Breakfast was eaten on a small island in the centre of the stream, and immediately on its conclusion we set to work to arrange the various packages amongst the men, who would have to carry them on their backs through a probable fifty miles of vile swamp. We told Chotil that he would have to stimulate his Indians to tremendous exertions, as our object was to pass as quickly as possible out of a fever district which would play dreadful havoc amongst them if they loitered on the road.

The morning was consumed in rearranging the baggage into convenient parcels for the men to carry, and by dinner-time everything was in readiness for an immediate start. But, as we intended to cover the first twenty-five miles which intervened between the river and the quartz mounds in one day, we announced our intention of not moving until the following morning.

We passed an intensely lazy afternoon, alternately dozing and smoking. When wide-awake, my thoughts naturally reverted to El Dorado. It seemed surpassing strange that I, who had so recently treated its existence as a mere fable, should now be within fifty miles of its borders! What would the next few days bring forth? Would they ensure us life and success, or would they look grimly down on our death and failure? I hardly dared to answer the questions which presented themselves to my pensive mind, and a solemn feeling intruded itself and drove out my usual gaiety of heart. Was this melancholy, which gradually overshadowed me, a presentiment of things to come, or was it only the realization that we were to combat no longer any physical or visible peril, but an invisible, stealthy foe who would pour his innumerable battalions of microbes through the least flaw in our armour? I could not assign any reason for the sadness

which oppressed me, but I felt vaguely as if some coming events were casting their shadows before, to warn or prepare me against the day of their occurrence. Suddenly Gillett's voice aroused me from my reverie.

"Begone dull care!" he sang. Then coming closer, he said, "What on earth has induced you to adopt such a lugubrious expression of visage?"

"I cannot tell you," I replied. "But I feel horribly depressed, just as if some fearful evil was about to overtake me."

"Feverish, eh?" ejaculated the disciple of Galen, as he seized hold of my wrist. "No, not a bit," he added with a sigh of relief. "I was frightened that you might already have got a touch of fever. But let me give you a word of advice. Carefully avoid depression of spirits, for that means depression of vitality, which constitutes a huge rent in your protective armour through which the fever germs will invade you—and Heaven help the man in whom they effect a lodgment."

"Your last remark is not particularly reassuring," I replied. "What with you by my side and the malarial swamp in full view, I feel further off than ever from being a Mark Tapley."

"Don't be absurd," said the doctor. "Certainly Mark Tapley had a philosophical mind, and that will never fall to your lot. But there is a difference between being despondent before a single misfortune has happened, and succumbing to them when they crowd around. Cheer up, man, and if you can't, then the fire-water of the pale-faces shall give you a little artificial courage."

The doctor's cheerful exertions, and some stimulant, soon drove out the spirit of melancholy, and the rest of the day passed off without any relapse. But, even now, as I write this at home in England, I am firmly convinced that that gloomy reverie was a distinct foreshadowing of some of the agonies of mind I should have to undergo before our

perilous adventure had been brought to a conclusion. Had I possessed the gift of second-sight, I might have been able to penetrate the dim vista of the future, and have seen some of those events which Fate had decreed should come to pass. But as I was not a seer, I took Gillett's advice, shook off the weird impression, and slept soundly till daybreak.

CHAPTER IX.

ACROSS THE RUBICON.

As soon as the sun had acquired sufficient force to disperse some of the dense, malignant-looking mist which hung over land and river, the signal was given to quit the island and row across to the region of malaria. The Indians knew nothing of the danger they were about to incur—they would laugh to scorn an invisible foe, and would grapple bravely with a physical one—hence they shouldered their packages joyfully, and talked incessantly about their near approach to the country of gold and precious stones. Hour after hour passed, as we toiled through the thick and oftentimes prickly undergrowth, and when we urged the men to as rapid a pace as possible, they responded eagerly and uttered no murmur at our manifest impatience. The steamy heat which enveloped us was almost unbearable ; my gun seemed to have increased in weight by many pounds since the early morning, and my muscular fatigue became so great that I only managed to keep up with the rest by impressing myself with the feeling that it would be shameful for an Englishman to give in where an Indian continued to go on !

I hailed the call for the mid-day halt with a prayer of gratitude, and immediately threw myself on to a mossy bank utterly unable to do anything. Gillett was a man of iron, for he walked backwards and forwards amongst the Indians, issuing his orders as if he had been accustomed

to this sort of climate all his life. When he had settled everything, he came to where I was reclining, and flung himself down beside me.

"This is warmer work than I expected," he remarked, panting and perspiring at every pore. "A week of this would erase my name from the *Medical Register*."

"Then you are not so cast-iron as I imagined," I replied. "As I lay here watching you bustling about amongst the Indians, I fairly envied you your imperviousness to heat; while, as for me, I could not have issued a single order to save my life."

"Pooh, man! If I had not been here, you would have been forced to take the command. At least, I think I understand you better than to imagine that you would let a little fatigue ruin the expedition. These Indians are splendid fellows as long as they are led by a chief who keeps his eye on every one of them; but the moment he deputes too much of his authority to a subordinate, and ceases to show them that he is vigilant, then discipline becomes lax, mutiny creeps in, and then total disorganization, ending fatally for the white man. I tell you this, because the time may come when you will be thrown on your own resources. I may be shot down, dead from fever, or what not, and then you *must* take the command which you have allowed to fall too much into my hands. In dealing with Indians, my maxim is to be just yet resolute, kind yet firm, and, if necessary in an extreme moment of danger, to be courageous and daring above the bravest of them."

Chotil's advent with our dinner cut short the doctor's lecture. But it had due weight, for it showed me that where physical strength failed, moral courage—a rare commodity—could still carry its possessor to the front. He who would be "king of men" must have a moral as well as a brute force.

Only an hour was allowed for rest, and then the weary tramp was resumed again until dusk, when we finally

camped for the night. Fifteen miles was the utmost distance covered that day, much to Gillett's chagrin, for he had counted upon reaching the quartz mounds, but I was astonished we had got over so much ground, considering the insuperable obstacles we had to cut our way through.

I could no longer wonder why El Dorado had been an unattainable land, a sealed book, both to Europeans and natives. It required a stout heart, an invincible courage, and a robust physique to battle successfully with the gigantic barriers erected by Nature, and cunningly chosen by this hidden nation as a security against molestation. On the very first night we encamped in this lovely but fatal region, the Indians were thrown into a panic of fear by a visit from the guardian spirits of the marshes. Our first intimation of anything being amiss was the sudden appearance of Chotil, who, with terror depicted on his countenance, besought the Machi to protect him.

"Is the camp attacked?" asked Gillett, startled by the chief's genuine alarm.

"Yes, yes, by thousands!" came the answer.

"Take your gun and revolver, Wrenforth, and come with me," said the doctor.

"Guns are useless," interposed Chotil, with chattering teeth.

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Gillett angrily.

"Mortal weapons cannot prevail against these enemies," said the chief solemnly. "They are the guardian spirits of the Atlagi, placed here to kill any one who dares to invade their territory."

"Confound the fellow for giving me such a scare," said Gillett savagely. "It is only those wretched will-o'-the-wisps after all!"

"Have they injured any of the men yet?" I inquired innocently.

"Not yet," replied Chotil. "We only discovered them

some distance off just before I came to the Machi. We were preparing for sleep, when one of the men, peering through the watch-fires into the darkness, saw many flaming swords being waved about. He instantly raised the alarm, and I came here at once to beg you to cast a spell over them."

"You must do something," I said, turning to the doctor. "If we send Chotil about his business, we shall wake up to-morrow morning to find the camp deserted."

Gillett looked thoughtful for a moment, then, addressing me, said—

"How can I convince these ignorant savages that their dread enemies are nothing more than incandescent marsh gas? They know nothing about carburetted hydrogen, and all the talking in the world would never prove to them anything contrary to their preconceived idea of its being a supernatural phenomenon."

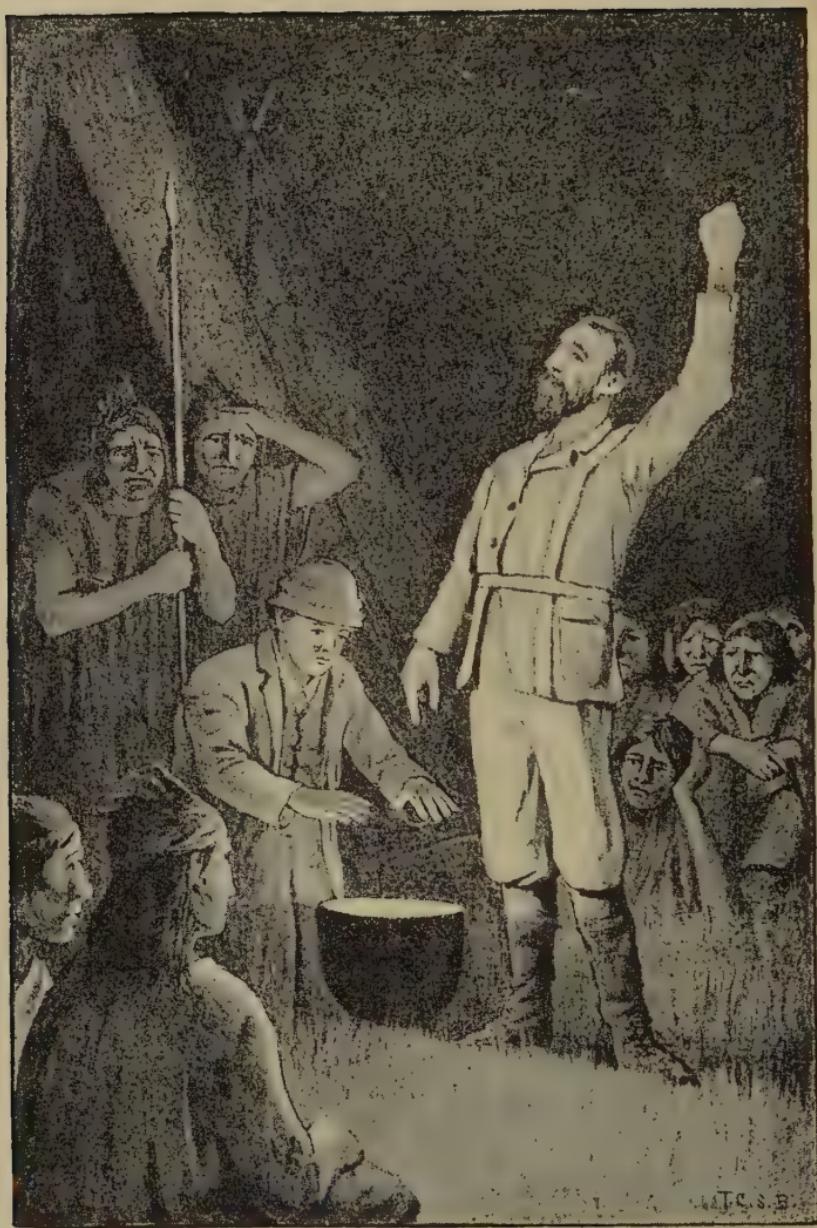
"Don't do any palavering at all," I replied. "Treat them to a good, imposing, magical incantation, for any nonsense is justifiable in calming their fears and preventing a panic."

Gillett reflected for a moment, and then told Chotil to return to his men, and inform them that he would presently be in their midst and weave a mighty spell which would effectually protect them from any evil influence.

Our preparations for the ceremony were few and simple. Gillett made his face luminous, handed me a bottle containing three or four pieces of sodium, with instructions what to do with them, and we then went down to the Indian quarters. The doctor's appearance created some alarm, which he quieted with a few well-chosen words, and, a calabash of hot water having been placed in the centre of the awestruck circle, the incantation began.

It is not my intention to describe the absurd farce which he enacted, but one part of it was sufficiently ingenious to deserve recording. His object being to show





The mystic ceremony was terminated by a long speech from Gillett.—*p. 131.*

by ocular demonstration his control over the will-o'-the-wispish spirits, he informed his audience, after many preliminary weaving of spells, that he would now make the leaders of the ghostly army appear in the bowl of hot water. If they failed to answer his call, he had no power over them! In grim and awful silence, the Indians stood watching the water, whilst I surreptitiously abstracted a piece of sodium from the bottle.

"Are you ready?" asked Gillett in Latin.

"Yes," I answered.

"Then as we stretch out our hands over the water, drop it in."

With defiant, threatening attitude, we stood over the calabash, and called out in good Indian for a spirit to appear. At that instant I dropped the sodium, which promptly ignited the liberated hydrogen of the water. A flame of light floated on the surface for a few seconds, and then disappeared. I repeated this process three times, amidst loud groans of terror from the Indians, who were firmly convinced that the chiefs of their spiritual enemies had been forced, by the Machi's spells, to appear before him and give an account of their deeds. The mystic ceremony was terminated by a long speech from Gillett, in which he asserted that all cause for fear had now departed, as the flaming foe had been bound over to keep the peace under awful penalties; that he had had mercy on the aforesaid foe and had consented to allow them to remain in the swamps; but that as they were perfectly powerless, they (the Indians) might shake their spears at them with impunity whenever they saw them.

We departed back to our tents through a crowd of dusky, prostrate forms, whose blessings afforded a most satisfactory proof that we had laid the ghost, and gulled the simple-minded creatures to their hearts' content. I have not the least doubt that if Gillett had not established such a reputation for supernatural power, we should have

been deserted by all, with possibly the solitary exception of Chotil. An Indian will brave any bodily danger, but his courage forsakes him utterly directly his superstitious fears are aroused. Indeed, Chotil subsequently told us that when his men first saw the will-o'-the-wisp they were seized with a strong impulse to flee back to the river, and run any risks rather than penetrate further into this haunted country. What we should have done, had we been left to our own devices, I know not, and the chief deservedly earned our gratitude by restraining his men in their first panic, and urging them to let him consult the Machi before they took any rash steps.

Early the following afternoon our eyes were gladdened by the sight of the quartz mounds. We examined them carefully, and came to the conclusion that the hand of man had only recently rearranged them, for their upper surfaces were quite clean, whilst underneath there were numerous lichenous incrustations. Evidently the government of Chalco kept its milestones in proper repair. From this point we turned in an easterly direction, being determined to utilize every remaining hour of daylight, but long before we thought of calling a halt, man after man was seized with shivering, until seven, including myself, were *hors de combat* with ague.

Gillett was now obliged to stop, but he informed us that he had no intention of staying in the marshes to nurse the sick, for that would simply mean a fatal issue to all. He had light litters constructed during the night, and at dawn we were borne off rapidly. Good progress was made, notwithstanding the additional encumbrance of the invalids, and, when we again camped, we fondly hoped that it was for the last time in that fever-stricken swamp.

My touch of ague was so mild that I felt nothing but a slight lassitude the next morning, and therefore announced my intention of discarding the litter. But I soon regretted my haste to be well, for that day's journey seemed the

worst I had yet experienced. The tangled masses of creepers that were festooned from tree to tree were so impervious, that we were constantly cutting a passage through them, and the ground was so quaggy that we frequently sank in ankle-deep.

During one of our numerous halts occasioned by these obstructions, I had my attention attracted by a bird, about thirty yards away, whose plumage was so magnificent that I determined on effecting its destruction. To make sure of my quarry, I crept stealthily up to within ten yards of its resting-place without its being conscious of any hostile presence, and then, with a feeling of triumph, raised my gun to fire. In the act of doing this, I trod on the dead branch of a tree, and made such a crackling noise that I feared I had scared it away. But no ! There he still sat, to my astonishment, perfectly tranquil, staring fixedly at some object which apparently absorbed his whole attention. I now thought that perhaps I might be able to capture him alive at the cost only of a broken wing, so with this intention, I again advanced warily, ready to fire the moment he rose. But still he sat in his cataleptic state, and suffered me to get within a few feet without evincing the slightest perturbation at my appearance.

Thinking that there must be some reason for the bird's extraordinary behaviour, I looked around, but could see nothing more out of the way than a large dead limb of a tree, speckled with yellow and white lichen. But a second careless glance revealed the fact that this admirable representation of a withered bough was instinct with life. I became petrified with horror, and no longer wondered at the bird's fascination, when the apparently dead tree began to sway gently with an undulating motion that exposed to view the glaring eyes and bifid tongue of an enormous Anaconda !

It is no longer a matter of astonishment to me that the mythologies of many nations agree in depicting the arch-

enemy of mankind in serpent form, for, as I gazed on the glittering, sinuous folds of this thing of terror, and watched its cruel eyes as they fixed themselves on me, I shuddered with an awful dread, and almost imagined it to be a loathsome messenger from the bottomless pit.

Thoroughly overcome by the fear it inspired, I became nerveless, and completely lost my head ; I was as fascinated and helpless as the poor bird had been. At last, by a strong effort of will, I regained a slight glimmer of sense, shouted wildly for help, and then remembered my still undischarged gun. But I had let my golden opportunity slip, for as I made a movement to raise the weapon, the hideous reptile, like a flash of lightning, darted at me.

I have but a confused recollection of what followed, for I gave myself up for lost the moment his mouth closed on my elbow, causing a dull sensation of pain, and inflicting a wound which did not completely heal for a long time. But four rows of sharp, conical teeth meeting in my muscles aroused me, to some extent, from a dangerous apathy, and I again awoke to a faint knowledge of the peril I was in, by seeing the Anaconda's prehensile tail loose its grasp of the tree to which it was fixed, and its body being drawn up in the act of coiling around my wretched anatomy for the purpose of crushing life out of it.

It was a moment fraught with horror and despair when I saw twenty feet of huge snake curl round, preparatory to encircling me in fold number one of its embrace. I seemed to feel in anticipation the terrific pressure, the cracking of ribs, and the painful gasping for breath. But although I was keenly alive to the tortures which loomed so closely, yet my bewilderment was so great that I failed to note at the time that the serpent, in his eagerness for breakfast, had providentially enclosed a tree in his embrace, thus preventing him from exerting his full muscular power on my trembling self. But the reptile would have gained the victory in the long run had it not been for the opportune

arrival of Gillett, who, alarmed by my wild, hysterical shriek, had hastened to the rescue.

The cry of horror that burst from him as he took in the state of affairs, informed me of his presence, and aroused in my fainting heart a great throb of hope. A rifle-shot broke the awful silence of the forest, and shattered the spell which bound me, as well as the Anaconda's head. Then, overcome by the sudden revulsion of feeling, and the pain of my wound, I fell to the ground in a heavy swoon.

The whole of this incident did not take ten minutes in transaction, yet, not even excepting my fall over the precipice in the pass of Thegtheg, I do not think I have ever been nearer death. On analyzing subsequently the mental feelings I experienced whilst literally in the jaws of the Anaconda, I have come to the conclusion that, after the first few seconds, they were so blunted and dazed that I should scarcely have felt the torturing process of crushing to death. I believe that the fear of extinction, which manifests itself by frantic struggles for self-preservation, is so keen and terrific that it exhausts the perceptive power of the mind together with the sensibility of the body, which thus acquires a perfect indifference to whatever may happen to it. Once or twice, force of will restored me to a consciousness of peril, but, as a similar exertion of mental power is probably impossible to the brute creation, I have formed a vague idea that the Anaconda's method of killing its prey is not so hideously cruel or painful as one would imagine.

As Gillett was determined to keep the serpent as a trophy, the Indians skinned it expeditiously, and found its measurement to be exactly twenty-one feet. When we sat around our camp-fires that evening the conversation turned upon snakes, and Chotil told us a curious anecdote concerning the instinct of birds in driving off their subtle enemy.

He was passing through a forest when his attention was attracted by the cries of a bird, which was hovering about in great terror over its nest full of young. Chotil soon ascertained the cause of her trouble, for he saw a venomous snake wriggling along towards the branch which held the nest. Presently the male bird flew off and darted about hither and thither as if searching for something. Very shortly he returned with a small leafy bough in his beak, which he carefully laid over his progeny. Meanwhile the snake advanced to the nest with his glittering eye fixed on its occupants until he came in contact with the leaves which covered them. As if he had received a sudden blow, he turned round and made off as fast as possible, and soon disappeared in the long grass. From Chotil's explanation it seems that the leaves of this particular plant are poisonous to some species of snakes, and that the bird, by some instinct, was aware of the fact, and used it as a protection.

We were up betimes the next morning in joyful anticipation of getting out of this slough of despond before many more hours had elapsed; and our anxious expectations were realized a little sooner than we thought probable, for just at the hour of the mid-day meal we espied through the foliage the glimmer of the sun on the surface of a rather wide river. With intense eagerness we pressed forward, stood on its bank, and strained our eyes to the opposite shore. There could be no doubt about its being the one described by Desmonde, and all thoughts of food were banished by the desire to get across and place ourselves out of the reach of the pestilential malaria which surrounded us. The Indians agreed to defer their meal until everything had been transported to the soft green slopes across the river, and set to work with amazing energy to construct the needful rafts.

Whilst their construction was being carried out under the superintendence of Chotil, Gillett and I passed our

leisure in surveying the mysterious country we were so soon to enter.

After the forest, closely matted with luxuriant vegetation, and uncomfortably quaggy from the infiltration of its soil with nearly continuous inundations, our eyes turned with inexpressible relief to the green hills, sparsely wooded, that reared themselves gently up from the river bank. Some little distance behind these, others rose still taller and of a most dazzling white colour, which, Gillett informed me, was due to their consisting almost entirely of pure quartz. Vegetation grew more scarcely on these, but still there was just sufficient foliage to relieve what would otherwise have been an intense monotony. Some of the quartz hills presented the peculiar appearance of a cone with its apex cut off, and, on examining them more narrowly through my field-glass, I detected on one a glare as if the sun's rays were being reflected from burnished brass. I stared at this for a considerable time, trying to find a solution for the phenomenon, until I finally satisfied myself that I was, without doubt, gazing at the battlements and polished roofs of a large city, which I felt sure was Chalco.

I cannot describe our exuberance of spirits as we strained our eyes at the goal of all our hopes—at a city, the quest for which had sustained us through many hardships and dangers. What Pizarro, Raleigh, and all the adventurous heroes of old had failed to accomplish, was now done by two Englishmen! The rapture produced by gratified pride and vanity completely upset the doctor's gravity, and prompted him to execute a Terpsichorean movement, the grotesqueness of which would have "brought down" a London house. I was grateful that our Indians were out of sight, for had they witnessed this strange performance, in which I felt compelled to join, we might have sunk considerably in their estimation. But we had our *pas de deux* entirely to ourselves, and having thus got

rid of a superabundance of overwhelming delight, resumed the customary cold gravity of the pale-faces.

With the termination of this childish ebullition of pleasure, graver thoughts obtruded themselves, and I was again seized with that intense depression of spirits which had overcome me on the eve of the journey across the swamp. It seemed so like a presentiment of coming trouble that I involuntarily heaved a deep sigh, and attracted Gillett's attention, who asked what the matter was. The sound of his voice broke the spell, and a soft, subdued feeling of pleasure stole over me and drove out the gloomy thoughts.

"Do you think we shall get into Chalco with the same ease as Desmonde?" I asked, seeing that my companion was waiting for me to say something.

"Oh, that is the question which wreathed your brow with deep anxiety!" he replied. "Well, I imagine we shall, for the odds are a million to one against the Chalconians having seen a white man since his time. But for fear of getting into the same fix as our predecessor, and being hedged in with a troublesome divinity, we ought to instantly proclaim our humanity and deny even the most distant connection with Pillan or any other idol they may worship. It would be hard lines to have undertaken all the worry and anxiety of this expedition merely for the sake of being marched off to a temple, mounted on pedestals, and made gods of."

The doctor's ludicrous expression, as he uttered these words, sent me off into a peal of laughter.

"If they should treat us as they did Desmonde and Buttler, you would find it anything but a laughing matter," he exclaimed irritably.

"I am not quite so sure about that," I replied. "Just think how wonderfully well you would look on your perch, with a stethoscope in one hand and a scalpel in the other. You have a certain majesty of demeanour which would

admirably adapt you for elevation to celestial rank, *vice* Desmonde deceased. I imagine I could take up the rôle of Buttler and do fairly well as your factotum. But my actions shall be so intensely human as to obviate any suspicion of my being a spirit. No, I will humbly mix with the crowd and come daily to worship you."

"You will have to use a little common sense, or you will assuredly come to grief amongst this strange people," said Gillett contemptuously.

"As far as I am concerned, I think I am showing the acme of sense in declining to become a candidate for divine honours," I replied.

"Perhaps we had better leave things celestial and descend to this mundane sphere for a brief space," said the doctor. "I perceive our fellows have almost completed the rafts, so we ought to superintend their loading."

In a few more minutes we were amongst the Indians, and busily engaged in seeing our property safely embarked. Then, when the first raft had received as much cargo as it would hold, Gillett and I stepped on board.

"This bark is carrying Cæsar and his fortune!" exclaimed the doctor half seriously.

"Then give the order for the passage of the Rubicon," I added impatiently.

In ten minutes more we landed on the shores of El Dorado, and pressed the soil of a country long since believed to have only a fabulous existence, but which, to us, would henceforth have a reality as solid and concrete as that of Great Britain.

Three journeys were required before our goods, chattels, and men were collected together on the territory of the Atlicaligui; then we marchel some way up the green slope of the nearest hill, where we formed our encampment and preparel to enjoy a meal with the heartiest of appetites.

It was an unmixed blessing to be able to sit in an

atmosphere entirely free from the mephitic vapours of the marshes below. The consequences of being able to fill our lungs with pure oxygen soon showed themselves in an elasticity of movement utterly different from our previously stiff and decrepid manner of crawling about, and in a steady buoyancy of spirits. Even the wound I received from the Anaconda became much less painful after imbibing the fresh air for an hour. Chotil approached us in ecstasies, and, after congratulating the Machi on the successful result of his magic wisdom, produced a few small nuggets of gold for our inspection.

"The land is all gold!" he exclaimed. "I picked these up close to where I was sitting, and in an hour I could obtain enough to buy all the guns and cattle in Peru."

We examined the specimens carefully, and found them to consist of nearly pure gold.

"This is only what I expected from the general geological appearance of the country," said Gillett. "No doubt many of these plutonic rocks around us conceal rich veins of the precious metal, and the sand and detritus must be full of it."

"I am glad to hear it for your sake," I replied. "And you will acknowledge that wandering over the earth with me has turned out a better speculation than half starving on the miserable pittance offered you as Medical Officer of that Scotch Sanatorium."

"I think I shall find it hard to settle down to the drudgery of practice after the roving life I have been leading, and I shudder as I picture myself cooped up in that narrow-minded Scotch town! Ah, Wrenforth," he added, "I shall be delighted if I can carry away from here sufficient to relieve the heavy pressure on my father's small and inelastic income. That is the only reason I have for craving gold. For myself, work is a necessity of my existence, and if I were to become fabulously wealthy, I should never be an idle man."

"The Spaniards were not far wrong when they christened the country 'El Dorado,'" I said, lighting a cheroot. "I can see now a lot of our men picking up nuggets."

"I don't think we need trouble ourselves about pocketing the rough article," replied Gillett, "for I expect we shall find a perfect avalanche of refined gold when we set foot in Chalco."

As we did not intend to make our entrance into the city until the next morning, we all, Indians included, enjoyed the luxury of perfect rest. The gold-seekers gradually wearied of their quest, and, one by one, strolled back to take an afternoon *siesta*; sounds of merriment began to cease, and very shortly the camp became as silent as the grave. Even Gillett and I succumbed to the soporific influence of the warm, balmy air; our conversation assumed an intermittent character, and soon we were both wrapped in a slumber as profound as that of our followers.

* * * * *

Gillett and I awoke simultaneously, each struck apparently with the idea that something was happening. I looked at my watch; it was nearly five o'clock.

"It is time for that lazy Chotil to bring our chocolate," I remarked, stepping to the door of the tent with the intention of awakening the chief to a due sense of his duties. I pulled back the canvas flap, gained the open air, and then stood still, petrified with astonishment and anger at the sight I saw. Every one of our Indians was still fast asleep. Not even a sentinel had been posted to warn us of the approach of danger, and the consequence was that I beheld the camp surrounded by serried ranks of armed men, who stood rigidly erect, gazing silently at the intruders on their territory. I moved rapidly back into the shadow of the tent, and electrified Gillett with the news of the terrible predicament we were in.

"We can do nothing now," said the doctor in despair. "We are utterly taken by surprise, and the first move-

ment we made towards getting our men together and arming them, would be the signal for their massacre."

"But we have no proof that they intend to show us any hostility," I answered. "Let us go boldly but peacefully towards the leader, and the sight of our white faces will cause him to instantly prostrate himself."

"That is the wisest and only course we have to pursue," said Gillett. "We must therefore take our revolvers, and solve our doubts as quickly as possible."

"I am ready," was my reply.

"Come, then," answered the doctor.

We pulled aside the curtain and went forth to an interview upon which depended the lives of twenty-two men, and all our hopes of ever seeing the wonderful and far-famed capital of El Dorado.

CHAPTER X.

THE DOVE AND THE SERPENT.

My first glance, as we left the shelter of the tent, was towards our Indians, and I perceived that, during the short consultation with Gillett, the wily enemy had seized and bound them without the slightest opposition. Chotil looked eaten up with ferocity and anger, and bowed his head sullenly as we passed him.

But our attention was soon entirely taken up with the splendid array of armed men which confronted us. A murmur of surprise ran through the ranks as our presence was noticed, and it was no doubt due to our colour. But we were equally astonished that our appearance created no greater sensation than this, for we had both counted upon being greeted as something superior to ordinary mortals. There was no mistaking the chief, for his dress was so magnificent and his bearing so regal, that we singled him out from a group of officers only slightly less sumptuously attired than he was. On his head was a conical helmet of pure gold, relieved here and there with small cruciform pieces of some white metal, which, at that time, we took to be platinum. The front of the casque bore a device suspiciously like a St. Andrew's cross, and worked in diamonds of the first water. He wore a red linen tunic, confined at the waist by a kind of sword-belt, from which was suspended a short battle-axe, the handle being of polished wood and the head of obsidian. Over the tunic

was thrown a mantle of feather-work so exquisitely wrought as to resemble a mosaic of most brilliant colours, and this effect was still further heightened by its being studded with emeralds and rubies. His other garments consisted of knee-breeches of the same red material as the tunic, a small golden breastplate, greaves of the same metal ornamented with precious stones, and leather sandals adorned with rosettes of golden wirework. We were both so lost in admiration at this gorgeous but tasteful attire that we omitted for some moments to make any signs of our peaceful intentions, whilst the Chaleonian chief, on his part, remained silently regarding us with an air of dignified composure. Although our faces must have borne a look of intense curiosity, yet no such expression found a resting-place on the remarkably grave and handsome features of the man before us. He seemed every inch a soldier who concerned himself with nothing outside the pale of his duties.

We stood gazing at one another so long that I at last remarked aloud to Gillett that we had better seek for some means of assuring the chief of our pacific intentions.

"They can see that our hands are empty," replied the doctor. "But I suppose they will not be satisfied unless we prove to them that, although we have no arms, we still have tongues."

"Speak on then, for this is getting monotonous, and I want my chocolate," was my flippant rejoinder.

Gillett advanced a few steps towards the chief, and immediately a whole forest of lances was raised threateningly against him. The commander issued an order, and the weapons were lowered again, while he himself moved as if to meet Gillett half-way, and beckoned to him to come on without fear.

"We come in peace!" said the doctor, first in English and then in the only Indian dialect he knew.

Directly Gillett spoke the chief started, and an expression

of deep perplexity passed over his face. Then, to our utter astonishment, he replied in a mixture of very broken English and Indian.

“Where did the white man learn the language of one of the tribes of Chalco?” was the astounding question he propounded to us.

“It is the speech of our country,” said the doctor.

“The white man lies, as all white men do,” answered the chief brusquely. “But tell me your object in coming to this land. Stay! Consult with your friend as to the answer you will give, and then I shall have but one falsehood to deal with instead of two.”

“This is not a flattering reception,” said Gillett to me in a low voice. “But is it not remarkable that we should be addressed in an Anglo-Saxon jargon by an Indian living at such an enormous distance from civilization?”

“The man and his followers have undoubtedly lived, at some time or other, near an English settlement,” I answered. “In their pride at having mastered the language of the dominant race, they have adopted it as their own. English is probably the official speech of Chalco much in the same way that French is that of Europe.”

“Have the strangers settled on the words they will speak?” suddenly broke in the chief.

“Yes,” said Gillett. “We are rich men who love to travel into far countries and study the ways and customs of their peoples. A fondness for learning, and a desire to know all the inhabitants of earth, have brought us hither to Chalco before we die.”

“The law of the Atlicaligui is this,” said the chief, in a voice tinged with melancholy,—“that any man of alien race found in its territories is to be handed over to the serpent-worshippers for sacrifice. Your lives and those of your followers are therefore doomed.”

“Then you ought to put up notices on your frontiers

warning strangers of the terrible penalty they may expect for the privilege of looking upon your barbaric gold and splendour," I exclaimed angrily.

Fortunately, wrath made my utterance too rapid for the chief to follow my meaning. He therefore appealed to Gillett to interpret, which he did by softening down the asperities.

"There is justice in your speech," he said, turning to me. "But necessity demands the rigid execution of the law, for we have been a persecuted nation, and might have again to undergo the horrors meted out to a conquered people, if we did not adopt every means in our power to keep ourselves hidden from the world. It is for this reason that it is decreed that no stranger who has trespassed on our lands shall ever recross the border alive. It is a cruel law, but the safety of the nation demands it."

"But surely you would not execute judgment upon men who, speaking your language, must be in some way related to you?" I asked.

"Your knowledge of my native tongue is certainly remarkable," said the chief musingly. "To kill you would seem like slaying those of my own race."

"It would indeed!" I ejaculated heartily.

"Perhaps it may be possible to save you two," continued the chief. "But no mercy can be extended to your followers."

"I am not going to accept mercy at the expense of those brave fellows who have so patiently toiled after us," was my indignant outburst. "I would sooner die than sink to such a depth of ignominy."

The chief understood, and was pleased to smile graciously at my sentiments. Then Gillett took up the talking with more effect and much less anger than I had imported into it.

"One very important reason for our having undertaken this long and dangerous journey has not yet been stated,"

said the doctor. "Know then, that whilst we were in a country by the great sea, tidings reached us that a countryman of ours was living here at Chalco."

"The news was false," said the chief. "No stranger has entered the city for countless years."

"But he came here many, many years ago," persisted Gillett. "To us he is known by the name of Desmonde, and—"

"Stay," interrupted the chief. "Your tidings were true, for he is my ancestor and the founder of the tribe of the Deesmunxiatl!"

"Then we are relatives!" exclaimed the doctor effusively. "There can now be no question of putting us to death, for such a thing would be a horrible stigma on our common kinship. Let us enter Chalco, and stay long enough to hear our brother's history, and then depart in peace."

When he had said this, he produced Desmonde's diary and held it out to the chief, who took it and looked at it solemnly for some minutes. Then he returned it, saying—

"Your words are truth, for the book is written in our sacred writing, and in the hand of our great ancestor Deesmunx himself. The sanguinary law of the Atlicaligui shall be violated for once, and I will cast my protection around you and your followers, welcoming you as brothers in the name of Xexuteotl."

"Who is Xexuteotl?" inquired Gillett.

"It is the name of our Man-God," explained the chief, who now approached and touched us each on the forehead in token of friendship.

In another minute, we were surrounded by a small crowd of officers who were eager to imitate their leader in welcoming us to Chalco. The news of our relationship to their great progenitor soon spread amongst the common soldiers, and the cordial greetings with which they received us made ample amends for the anxiety we had just passed through.

Without loss of time our Indians were liberated, and Chotil came to us with a countenance beaming with joy.

"I felt sure that the Machi would cast his spell over the golden chief!" he exclaimed. "Behold, but an instant ago they would have cut us to pieces, but now they are brothers."

"And we must treat them as brothers," said Gillett. "Therefore get ready a repast for them, and when we have eaten and drank together we shall know that treachery is not in their hearts."

The chief, whose name we discovered to be Amu, and his officers accepted our invitation to refresh themselves in our tent, and very shortly we were all conversing in a most amicable manner. I was particularly struck with their quiet and polished demeanour, which almost made me believe I was talking to my own countrymen—an impression still further increased by a slightly English cast of features, which were also many shades lighter than the copper-coloured Indian.

Chotil quickly laid before us a meal prepared from our stock of tinned meats and vegetables, and served it in tin dishes. At the sight of these latter, our guests eyed them curiously, and Amu exclaimed—

"My brothers must be mighty princes to possess such costly plates!"

Gillett and I stared at one another with astonishment at such an extraordinary speech, for they were the commonest tin articles, and were bought more for use than ornament.

"We also think that you must be a person of great consideration and wealth to possess so much gold," was Gillett's reply.

"Nay, gold is but dross here," answered Amu. "The commonest person can clothe himself with it from head to foot if he is so minded."

"And any man can do the same thing with tin in my country," said Gillett laughing.

Amu took up the helmet which was by his side, and handed it to us for inspection, saying—

“Those crosses on the gold are the only precious things there, and they are of tin.”

We were still engrossed in conversation when darkness fell, and Amu politely suggested that we should strike our tents and accompany him to the city as soon as the moon rose. Certain now of a friendly reception, we agreed to his proposition with alacrity, and directed Chotil to prepare for the march. Before starting we presented each officer with a plate and a meat-tin, and their unsophisticated delight at being the possessors of such treasure was a sight worth seeing !

Amu's soldiers, who had been mixing freely with our Indians, were summoned to attention by a word of command. With military precision they immediately assumed the form of a wedge, the front rank being composed of two and the rear of forty men. There were in all twenty ranks, so that we were enabled to compute the number of warriors in it to be four hundred and twenty. Each man was armed with a thick leathern buckler overlaid with plates of gold, and a spear sixteen feet long, besides a short cutting sword for use at close quarters. The commander placed himself a little to the right of the front rank, and a subordinate officer took his station at every fourth row. It was a formidable-looking war-engine, but like its prototype the famous Macedonian phalanx, seemed too unwieldy to stand with impunity against the attack of lighter and more mobile troops.

Our little band of men formed up as an irregular mass to the right of Amu, with the understanding that when we neared the gates of the city, they were to be absorbed into the phalanx. We ourselves took up our station by the chief's side.

A roll of drums was now heard, and as the last note was struck, every man shouldered his lance, much in the same

way that European soldiers do with their weapons, and then the march commenced. When we arrived at the top of the slope on which we had encamped, we were confronted with a narrow suspension bridge, constructed of timber and rope, which stretched from this point to the opposite hill, and spanned a chasm of considerable depth. Two sentinels guarded the approach, and it was their duty, Amu informed us, to cut the bridge whenever a hostile force appeared in sight—a contingency which did not seem very likely to happen, although every praise was due to this people for leaving nothing to chance.

At a tap of the drum, the wedge resolved itself with amazing celerity into a column of twos, and, breaking step, passed over the bridge on to a broad highway cut out of the mountain side, and paved with quartz, which, even to my unpractised eye, was rich in gold.

Gillett noticed this fact also, for he turned to me and said, "They even pave their streets with the precious metal! We shall be able to carry away from this place enough to make a Rothschild become green with envy."

"I have but one regret," I replied. "It is that we have cast away so many meat tins *en route*. Each would here be worth a king's ransom."

"I think we still have enough curios left to barter away for gold and diamonds," answered Gillett with a pleased chuckle. "We have eighteen more tin plates, quite a hundred meat canisters, and I possess a set of tin funnels amongst my chemical apparatus, each of which I value at £20,000 sterling."

"I estimate the total value of the articles you mention to come to something very near two millions and a half golden sovereigns," I replied sarcastically.

"And very cheap at the price too!" said the doctor in a tone of conviction.

"But it will be very injudicious to throw so much tin on the market at once," I exclaimed in tragic horror. "It

will become so cheap that all the 'Arrys and 'Arriets of Chalco will take to wearing the fashionable metal."

"They may do what they like as long as I can load up our Indians with two millions' worth of gold," answered Gillett. "I have the '*auri sacra fames*' well developed, and intend to gratify it to the utmost."

"Physician, heal thyself!" I exclaimed. "You have caught a disease I would not have for all the wealth of the Indies."

"Pooh!" he ejaculated. "You were inoculated with gold directly you were born, and so can never suffer from the ailment. One attack of the disease exhausts the susceptibility of the system to—"

"Come!" I interrupted; "you are getting into a muddle with your argument, and merely for the sake of dragging in some medical fact. You will be able to expound by the hour to Amu, so please give my ears a rest from pathological lectures."

I am afraid Gillett did not appreciate the way in which I invariably cut him short whenever he started on his pet science. On this occasion he turned away with his usual irritating remark about ignoramuses, and plunged into conversation with our host.

Left thus to myself, I had leisure to examine the country we were traversing, and very varied and beautiful I found it. The hills we were on possessed a luxuriant but not too prolific vegetation, while deep down in the valleys broad fields highly cultivated, with numerous streams meandering through them, formed a very picturesque scene in the bright moonlight. Strangely contrasting with this soft pastoral country of wood and field, the barren, conical, quartz hills rose up in the background, looking majestic, cold, and cruel in the glitter of the moonbeams. During the march we crossed three timber and rope suspension bridges, and had gradually descended until we at last arrived at the base of one of these extra-

ordinary conical hills. Here we passed over a massive stone viaduct which spanned a broad stream, and then mounted upwards by a series of zigzags until a turn in the road placed us on a broad plateau, and in full view of the city of Chalco.

As if to heighten the effect of the panorama, the moon became obscured, and allowed us to see the city bathed in its own soft light, and its roofs and domes sparkling and scintillating with thousands of rays reflected off their golden material. The illumination was something so magnificent that a truthful description of it would read like a chapter out of the *Arabian Nights*. Then the moon burst forth again, and sharply defined a number of splendid buildings, and revealed the mathematical conformation of the town. Its form was that of a parallelogram, and it was protected by a massive wall of quartz along which towers were placed at regular intervals. The walls were loopholed for bowmen, and on the ramparts I detected huge cumbersome engines for throwing enormous stones. The sight of these curious things almost made me imagine that, instead of wandering along the earth, I had gone many centuries back in the stream of time, and was now beholding an ancient Grecian or Assyrian fortress. It was an odd sensation, and for the moment I really believed that nineteenth-century civilization was a dream from which I had just awakened, and that I was now in my proper place in the midst of all this barbaric and massive splendour.

Amu's phalanx halted as we arrived in an open space in front of the great gate, a ponderous structure of timber overlaid with thick plates of gold, and through whose open portals we could discern a vast pyramid rising to a stupendous height, and numerous smaller ones dotted over the city.

Before quitting us to meet the guard at the gate, Amu whispered to us to keep close to his soldiers.

"Ambouli, lord of the Tlilcoatli, is captain of the city this month," he said in explanation. "His tribe furnishes the executioners, and as the number of malefactors is very small, and the desire of his priests for sacrificial victims very large, I anticipate some trouble before I can pass you through the gates. Keep well, therefore, under the protection of my soldiers."

As Amu advanced to meet Ambouli, we criticized the latter very keenly, with the result of not being greatly prepossessed in his favour. His attire was identical in style with that worn by our protector, with the exception of the device on his golden casque, which consisted of a serpent wrought in rubies, and the colour of his garments, which were purple instead of red. He was much swarthier than Amu, more slender, and shorter in stature; his features were more markedly of the aboriginal American type, and his small, coal-black eyes gleamed with an habitual expression of mingled malice and cunning. Altogether, we decided that the Lord of the Serpent tribe was far inferior in civilization, refinement, and virtue to the noble-looking descendant of Desmonde, and that we should probably find him an awkward and treacherous person to deal with.

Whilst we were thus discussing the merits—or rather demerits—of one of the powerful lords of El Dorado, he on his part reminded us that he was aware of our existence by the frequent glances he cast in our direction. The malicious satisfaction with which he eyed us, made us all extremely thankful that he was not on duty with the frontier guard when we entered his territory, for had he been, our fate would have been sealed. Neither Gillett nor I could cease from wondering at the great change that had taken place in the minds of the Atlicaligui regarding the white man. We had anticipated being the recipients of too much honour, and had formed plans for avoiding it, whereas, in actual fact, we had been coolly condemned to

death, and the whole white race insulted by being stigmatized as liars ! As we well knew, this was not the treatment meted out to Desmonde and Buttler, who were hedged in with too much pomp and ceremony. What, then, was the cause of this unwelcome change of opinion ? We discussed the point whilst Amu and Ambouli were debating on our fate, and were forced to admit that we knew of no facts to help us towards a solution of the disagreeable mystery.

"Look, Wrenforth," exclaimed Gillett, suddenly breaking off the previous conversation. "Our Serpent chief is getting excited, and evidently does not intend to let us off if he can help it."

Ambouli certainly appeared to be losing his temper, for he began to gesticulate fiercely and pour out a torrent of words with such vehemence that Amu, who was the essence of gravity and coolness, quietly passed his hand down to the handle of his obsidian battle-axe.

"They will come to blows in a few seconds," I remarked.

"Then Ambouli will get the worst of it," replied Gillett. "He has not half the physique of our friend."

"But the fellow looks treacherous enough to deal a blow in the dark," I answered. "If it should come to a fight, I think we ought to stand by and see fair play."

"Do you think it wise to leave the protection of the soldiers ?" asked the doctor. "Amu was very imperative about our remaining here, no doubt because he knows only too well the cunning and treachery of the serpent-worshippers. Besides, over there is a group of the enemy who would make no difficulty in effecting our capture."

"It seems to me that they are as equally menacing to Amu as to ourselves," I replied. "And this gives us a valid reason for interfering."

"Well, it may be so," replied Gillett thoughtfully. "Perhaps intervention is necessary, as I see Ambouli is

waxing fiercer. But one will be sufficient to curb the gentleman's temper, so you stay here whilst I go on."

"Thank you!" I said satirically. "I prefer to accompany you."

"What nonsense!" ejaculated the doctor. "Of what use is it for two to incur the risk?"

I made no answer, but walked quietly off towards the disputants. Gillett instantly followed, muttering, after his custom, a few uncomplimentary epithets about my obstinacy, crass stupidity, and so forth. When he had worked off his anger, he politely vouchsafed a warning for me to keep out of reach of Ambouli's spear, which had a terribly long range, and then relapsed into silence.

Amu looked perplexed as he saw us advancing, but, instantly forming his resolve, waved his hand, which had the effect of setting his phalanx in motion, and bringing it close to where we stood.

"My lord Amu is infringing the rules by halting his company within forty paces of the city walls, without having first received the permit of the captain of the gate," said Ambouli.

"My men are tired and want rest," answered Amu. "Can I keep them waiting whilst I argue the case of these prisoners? If I did that I should keep them standing till daybreak."

"You have only to comply with the commands of the King and deliver these strangers to my custody," said Ambouli savagely. "The moment this is done, you and your men can proceed homeward."

"We are not strangers," interrupted Gillett. "We are Desmonde's brothers, and came hither from afar to see him and his sons."

"Ye are white men, and therefore doubly deserve the doom our law reserves for all foreigners," replied the malignant Serpent chief.

"Why?" asked the doctor laconically.

"Because ye are liars, murderers, and plunderers!" came the answer.

"I will find an opportunity to make you eat your words," said Gillett with flashing eyes. "You ignorant, cruel, savage idolater!"

"Slave!" exclaimed Ambouli, "dost thou dare to speak unto a lord of Chalco without permission? To do this thing is to die."

Before Gillett could perceive what the man was about, his long formidable-looking lance was poised aloft, and in another instant my friend would have been transfixed had it not been for Amu, who threw himself between us and our assailant. Ambouli sullenly lowered his spear, whilst the doctor covered him with his revolver.

"Don't shoot," I whispered. "If you killed him we should raise a regular hornet's nest about our ears."

"Words of wisdom," muttered Gillett. "I will let him off this time, though he little knows how near he has been to death."

Our attention was diverted by a sharp word of command uttered by Amu. A sudden confusion seemed to agitate his phalanx, but it passed away with the rapidity of lightning, and we then found that the wedge formation had resolved itself into a hollow square, which contained in its interior the two chiefs and ourselves. Before we had time to recover from the astonishment produced by the extreme celerity and precision with which this clever manœuvre was accomplished, Amu again spoke.

"Listen, Ambouli, lord of the Tlilcoatli, these white men are of my kindred, and have come from the far east, as did my godlike ancestor many suns ago. They have entered our territory peacefully, having only a desire to hear tidings of their brother. Can they therefore be deemed strangers? Nay; they are of my family, and as such shall not be put to death."

"If thou wilt surrender their followers, perchance I may waive my claim to these pale-faces."

"Nay, that I will not," answered Amu stoutly. "Great lords of the Deesmunx tribe cannot wander forth without proper escort, therefore the Indians have committed no offence in following their chiefs into Chalco."

"I cannot admit thee into the city on such terms. I must do my duty," said Ambouli obstinately.

"We have a law which says that in case of dispute amongst officers on military service, the cause shall be laid before the King. I will therefore inscribe on a parchment the number of the foreigners under my charge, the reasons for my conduct, and sign it with my signet. This document thou canst lay before the 'Beloved of Ra-teotl' on the morrow, and he shall decide between us."

This appeal of Amu to the King's authority crushed any further opposition, and Ambouli was forced to sullenly agree to what he could not very easily avoid. The parchment was duly written, sealed, and delivered, and then we at last filed through the golden gates of Chalco, noticing as we passed the heavy scowl of hatred which the Serpent chief shot at us—a look which warned us to be cautious in any future dealings with him.

Immediately on entering the city we turned to the left along a broad, magnificently-kept road which ran parallel to the ramparts, and was a blaze of light from one end to the other. Every house had a row of golden censers swinging from its golden roof, and the reflection of the flames from such an enormous mass of metal increased tenfold the brilliancy of the illumination, and imparted a cheerful glow to the fairy scene. The people seemed to be a bright and laughter-loving race, for we oftentimes caught the sound of song and music, and saw through the open doors many a dance in joyful progress. Crowds were sitting in the verandahs which abutted on the street, and were engaged in animated conversation with their

neighbours, or were quietly smoking and enjoying the cool, balmy night air. Greetings frequently passed between the soldiers of our troop and these happy-looking civilians, but we white men fortunately escaped any ovation, because the semi-darkness hid our colour from prying eyes.

Everything we saw during the march through the city was so new, so unexpected, that we could not help imagining we had suddenly dropped from our own world on to another planet. But all these signs of happiness and contentment could not entirely banish the anxiety we felt at the uncertainty which hung over our fate. Amu's behaviour had been admirable, and had impressed us deeply with a belief in his truth and sincerity. We felt sure we could trust him to use whatever influence he possessed with the King on our behalf, but if it were not so great as that of the bloodthirsty Ambouli, our position would be so serious that we might well despair of life. We were in all twenty-two men, well armed and dead shots; but what was this against a people whose military discipline was simply perfect, and whose numbers alone were sufficient to crush us at the first onslaught? Both Gillett and I, however, swore one oath as we were marching along—whether to palace or dungeon we knew not—and it was that we would not suffer ourselves to be led meekly out to execution. To avert such an undesirable calamity it was necessary to avoid being separated from our Indians, and we therefore determined to keep close by them, and meet force with force should our host or gaoler make any such attempt.

Whilst we were settling these grave matters, the battalion came to a halt in front of an enclosure which contained a noble, dome-shaped pile of buildings. The officers quitted their positions and ranged themselves on each side of the fortified gateway, whilst the trumpeters blew a peculiar though melodious blast on their instruments. The heavy portals slowly moved back, then Amu came towards us,

and, with a courtesy not to be equalled in the best Parisian *salon*, welcomed us as his honoured guests, and begged us to make use of his property as if it were our own.

Our hearts leapt with joy as we heard these words—words which assured us that here at least our lives were sacred until the King had delivered his decision.

With ceremonious politeness Amu and his officers ushered us through the gateway, whose arch was formed by the touching of the expanded wings of two huge human-headed bulls, into a spacious courtyard beautiful with the aroma of tropical shrubs and flowers. Thence we passed beneath a golden-roofed verandah into the vestibule of the palace.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE MAN'S RELATIVES.

“*De gustibus non disputandum est,*” wrote somebody whose name I find it convenient to forget, in order to conceal my ignorance. To argue about taste in the matter of architecture is so utterly profitless, that I prefer at once to say that I was charmed with the domestic style of building adopted by the inhabitants of Chalco, and of which I was enabled to catch a fair glimpse as we marched from the city gates to the palace of Amu. No ugly, square, slate-covered erection offended my eye as we progressed up the street of the rampart. Such buildings are reserved for nations who deem themselves refined and civilized, and who care not a jot how unpicturesque their houses may be, provided there is plenty of luxury and comfort within. The universal type of house in Chalco was that of the dome. A large central one rose up to a variable height according as to whether it contained an upper storey or not, and this, in the commoner dwellings, formed the sitting-room of the family. Around the central structure a series of smaller domes were clustered, all of which opened into the principal one, and constituted the sleeping apartments. A golden-roofed verandah, supported by stone pillars and beautified by numerous creepers with brilliant flowers, ran all round the outside and added a delicate finish to the whole. The walls of these buildings were constructed of clear crystalline quartz cemented

together with a red mortar, and when the sun shone on them, the houses sparkled like gigantic diamonds in a crimson setting.

The architecture of Amu's palace, and of all the mansions of the nobles of Chalco, with the single exception of the King's, was similar to that of the humbler dwellings, being only larger, loftier, and containing invariably two or even three stories.

As we passed through the vestibule on this eventful night, into the space or atrium beneath the central dome, we were amazed at the tasteful magnificence which everywhere met our wondering gaze. The heavy purple curtains which closed the numerous exits were skilfully arranged in folds and profusely decorated with gold tassels and fringes. I afterwards discovered that the stuff of which they were made was the bark of a tree known as *Llanchama*, which, after cutting and pounding, becomes as flexible as cloth. The walls of the atrium were incrusted with alabaster, and rich vermilion-tinted stucco, and they were divided into panels by delicate, twisted golden pillars. The floor was a superb mosaic, and was covered here and there with skins of wild animals, and cotton mats dyed red, whilst heavy Egyptian-looking settees and chairs were scattered about. This apartment, which was used as the sitting-room in private houses, was Amu's hall of audience, where, as chief of his tribe, he transacted business and administered justice.

The moment we arrived, a number of servants, clad in red and white, with the St. Andrew's cross wrought in diamonds on the left shoulder, appeared through one of the doorways and saluted their lord and his guests by making the sign of the cross. An elegant spiral staircase of gold attracted my attention, because, descending it, I saw a group of ladies who, from the rich embroidery that adorned their garments, I imagined to be the family of our host. I recognized the wife immediately by her superior age and

maturer figure, majestic enough for a Delphic priestess ; but my eyes were riveted on the two young girls who accompanied her, and whose lithe forms and sweet features were fascinating beyond all conception to a man who had seen no beauty out of England for more than two years. The group had suddenly stopped short in their descent, and were gazing in wonderment—mixed, I am afraid, with terror—at the strange sight of our white faces. The half-opened lips, red and ripe, the timorous, hesitating glance in the dark bewitching eyes, the tiny sandalled feet poised in the air as if uncertain whether to advance or recede, and the unconscious grace of their attitude, formed the loveliest picture of female beauty I have ever seen.

To my intense regret, Amu caught sight of them all too soon, and broke the spell by calling them to him. As they came timidly forward, he saluted them, and then, taking his wife by the hand, led her to where we were standing, and presented us.

“Lady of the Diamond Cross, the Beloved of Xexuteotl ! welcome these two white men who have come from the same land in the far east which gave birth to our great ancestor. They are different from all the other pale-faces you have heard of, for they are the brothers of the god-like Deesmunx, and, tired of his long absence, have come hither to greet him. They are to us as uncles, and therefore as such let due honour be rendered unto them.”

A few gracious words of welcome were uttered, and then the Lady Amu and her two daughters stepped towards us, and each, with a pretty hesitation, touched us on the forehead. The ceremony of introduction being got through, I thought it behoved us to say something in acknowledgment of the hospitality so generously proffered. The presence of the fair sex overcame the lazy custom I had fallen into of allowing Gillett to take the lead in everything, so without giving him a chance on this occasion, I hurried into speech.

"We are exceedingly rejoiced at the kindness with which you have received your uncles, and our pleasure is greatly increased at seeing that the present representatives of our brother have admirably preserved that beauty of form and feature which is the distinguishing characteristic of our race. In our two fair nieces we can trace the exquisite loveliness which belongs to the female Desmondes alone."

"Very well put," whispered Gillett. "But they deserve much more praise than ever you could pump out of your unsentimental heart, for they are the most charming pieces of creation, both anatomically and—"

"Bother your anatomy and dissections," I retorted *sotto voce*. "It is downright profanation to apply your cold, cut-and-dried science to these beautiful girls."

"If you mean that for sentiment, it is a very poor attempt at the real thing," muttered the doctor.

Our whispered conversation was terminated by Amu directing his master of the ceremonies to take us to the room prepared for us. Here, as everywhere, everything was gold and precious stones. A golden bath, golden ewers, a ceiling of gold magnificently fretted, golden bedsteads and chairs, and, as a set-off to this appalling splendour, walls wainscoted with polished woods remarkable for the brilliancy and variety of their colours, and heavy *Llanchama* curtains of a hue excelling the Tyrian purple. We gazed with bewildered eyes upon all this luxury, and joyfully acknowledged that we had alighted upon a civilization perfect in cleanliness, refinement, and good breeding.

We had just finished our ablutions when the curtains of the doorway were drawn aside, and the master of the ceremonies reappeared, and, making the sign of the cross, announced that the lord of the Deesmunxiatl awaited our presence. We accordingly followed him, through two long lines of servants, across the atrium to the banqueting-hall, where a fresh surprise awaited us.

The walls of this apartment were of polished marble, and the domed roof was supported by a circle of heavy Egyptian pillars most beautifully fluted and inlaid with gold. Along the centre of the hall was a table covered with a crimson cloth and loaded with flowers and plate. Thirty high-backed, antiquated, but superbly-carved chairs were placed around, and by each stood a guest. As we entered, Amu hastened to conduct us to our seats, whilst an attendant presented us with a cotton napkin and a ewer of water. By watching the other visitors, we saw that we were required to perform another ablution in public, which we accordingly did, and the ceremony being over, we all sat down.

Both Gillett and I did ample justice to the repast, and we voted the *menu*, cooking, and manners generally to be worthy of the best *chef* and the most punctilious nobleman in Europe. As no one but the great lords of the King's Council and members of the family could be seated next to the Lady Amu, we were placed somewhere about the middle of the table, but I had the gratification of having her younger daughter, Oosita, on my right, whilst the elder, Eruna, sat next to Gillett. I was very pleased that the Atlicaligui did not adopt the barbarous custom of excluding women from their feasts, particularly as they had the wisdom to place two such very lovely ones so close to me.

When I had succeeded in taking the keen edge off my appetite, I found time to study my companion more closely, and the conclusion I came to was, that I had never before seen such a soft, sweet face, or such a superb figure, in any country I had visited. She was very shy, and seemed terribly afraid of me at first, no doubt believing that I was an ogre or some strange, ferocious monster; and I gathered from her manner that she regarded the white man with contempt and aversion. I was piqued and annoyed that so lovely a descendant of a good old Devonshire family should possess such erroneous opinions of her countrymen,

and resolved to undertake the task of converting her to more liberal views. After a long, desultory conversation, I succeeded in breaking the ice by enlisting her sympathy. I told her of our unwitting infringement of the law by entering the country of the Atlicaligui, of Ambouli's desire to sacrifice us, of Amu's compromise, and of our own fears that we might still have to suffer death for our indiscretion.

"It is a very cruel law," she said with a slight shudder, and a gleam of pity in her eyes. "It is so contrary to the spirit of our religion that my father has often wished to see it repealed; but as it has not been put in force within the memory of living man, the great Council has repeatedly shelved its discussion as a useless waste of time."

"Then the King will take a lenient view of the case, and let us off," I replied.

"I dare not raise your hopes too much," she answered. "Unfortunately the Serpent-worshippers form a large and powerful tribe whom the King has much trouble in keeping in order. If, therefore, Ambouli proves your guilt, and insists upon the law being carried out, the monarch's interference might cause a tumult and much bloodshed."

"Your argument means that if blood must be shed, it is preferable to spill that of strangers," I replied.

"The Deesmunxiathi and the royal tribe of Ra-teotl are averse to the death punishment except for the most heinous crimes, and were it not for the savage cruelty of the Serpent-worshippers, your safety would be ensured."

"Why should these Serpent-worshippers be so blood-thirsty?" I inquired, struck with astonishment that two sections of the people should hold such mild ideas, whilst the third should preserve the primitive lusts of a savage barbarism.

"Because they are cruel by nature, and by the rites of their religion, which inculcate human sacrifice," answered Oosit. "They are not of our race, for we have sprung from the white Deesmunx; nor are they of the royal tribe of

Ra-teotl, for they are descended from the mighty Olmec who came from over the great sea many thousand suns ago; but they are an admixture of Toltec, Aztec, and Atlicaliguian—a mongrel nation, whose only claim to our protection consisted in its possessing the slightest infusion of the pure blood of Olmec in its veins. We had compassion on them, and gave them refuge when the pale-faces drove them with thunder and lightning from their own valleys."

"From your remarks I gather that your common country must have been Mexico," I exclaimed. "But how could your savage friends have discovered your safe retreat amidst these isolated hills?"

"They knew the road of the Hieroglyph," answered Oosita.

"What is that?" I inquired curiously.

"A secret I dare not divulge, for swift death overtakes the traitor who makes a stranger acquainted with it."

Finding I could not persuade my companion to give me any further information concerning the mysterious road between the valley of Anahuac and Chalco—a road so jealously guarded that no European had ever known of its existence—I reverted once more to the subject of my *bête noire*, Ambouli.

"Are there no means," I asked, "whereby I can overcome the hostility of the lord of the Tlilcoatl? I am rich, the possessor of large masses of tin, and if Amu were to ask him to meet me here, I might induce—"

"No Serpent-worshipper ever pollutes my father's palace," interrupted Oosita. "Besides, his tribe love cruelty more than wealth, and would refuse to be bribed out of such an offering to their goddess."

"Your nation does not seem a very united one," I exclaimed. "How is it possible for your father to exclude such a great lord as Ambouli from his palace?"

"It has been so ever since the time of Deesmunx," said

Oosita. "The Tlilcoatli clung to their degrading rites and refused to recognize him; therefore our ancestor decreed that his family should have no social intercourse with them as long as they continued to worship the hideous Serpent. They are a cruel race," continued Oosita shuddering, "and they are also the executioners, all condemned criminals being handed over to the priests of Tlilcoatl, who cut out the victim's heart on the sacrificial stone, and offer it in a golden censer to their goddess. An offering of this kind has not taken place for a long time, as no crime worthy of death has been perpetrated, hence I can foresee the avidity with which Ambouli will pursue you until he gets you into his clutches."

My spirits sank many degrees as I listened to this outspoken account of the tribe whose chief had constituted himself our enemy. I leaned towards Gillett and rapidly told him the unpleasant news I had gathered from my fair companion, and asked him to rack his capacious brains in devising a way of escape from such a dilemma. I spoke in French, not wishing to be understood by the rest, although there was probably no necessity for doing so, as our modern English was very different to the Indian-Saxon of the Deesmunxiatli, and we often had to speak slowly and use illustrations in order that our friends might gather the sense of our conversation. But the long residence of the language in an equatorial climate, and its intermixture with words of Aztec or Olmec origin, had softened its native harshness and beautified it into an Italian sweetness, whilst the slight prolongation of the penultimate syllable of many of the most important words in a sentence, gave it a sensuous intonation—a soft, dove-like cooing, suggesting amiability in a man, and a great capacity for love in a woman.

I had food enough for reflection in the thought that, notwithstanding the wish of Amu, and probably of the King also, to protect us, they were powerless to do so in face of the superior necessity of keeping the Serpent-worship-

pers quiet. Cerberus must have his sop, and two white men, together with twenty Indians, would give him such a meal that he would remain gorged and docile for many a long day to come. I saw clearly enough, after Oosita's description of the state of politics in Chalco, that we were doomed men unless we found means to beat a speedy retreat.

This unpleasant reverie was interrupted by the soft, melodious voice of my sweet companion.

"Why is my uncle so sad?" it asked.

"Can I be happy with the knowledge that my life hangs on a thread?" I replied. "I do not fear death, but I dislike it to approach me in the form of a hideous pagan priest, whose only object is to offer my heart to a devil. How is it," I continued, "that our brother Deesmunx was received here with divine honours, whereas we have been met with contumely and insult? One would imagine that a whole crowd of all the rascals in Europe had paid you a visit, and left a very bad name for honesty behind them."

"I do not think a white man has ever penetrated to Chalco since the time of our great ancestor," answered Oosita. "But if we have not seen them, we have heard of their awful deeds. The very tribe which is seeking to persecute you migrated from the fertile valleys of Mexico in order to escape the fearful tortures the pale-faces inflicted to make them disclose where their hoards of wealth were hidden. Tales of broken faith, of burning alive, of wholesale executions, of greed and avarice beyond conception, were brought in by every refugee, until the name of white man became synonymous with everything that was vile, untruthful, and abominable."

"I am forced to admit that the original conquerors of your native land were a bloodthirsty and rapacious crew," I answered with a strong sense of humiliation. "They were a lawless set of adventurers, the scum of their country, and many of them desperate outlaws—animated by avarice,

and strangers to humanity or mercy. I am forced, for truth's sake, to admit that much ; but, believe me, the pale-faces are no longer the monsters you have been taught to call them. They have strong governments which enforce respect for law, order, life, and property. Holding such an opinion of the white man as your nation does, I do not wonder that you strive to keep your beautiful city concealed, or that you put to death any stranger who unwarily wanders hither ; but, I assure you, you have formed a wrong estimate of the whole white race because of the misdeeds of a handful of scoundrels who ousted your forefathers out of their homes."

"Your voice has the sound of truth, and your face an air of sincerity," said Oosita. "I will tell my father what you say, and he will inquire into the matter through his agents, for it is ungracious to condemn a great race wrongfully."

I was about to reply, when Oosita laid her hand warningly on me and pointed to her father. I saw Amu making a signal, and then a sudden silence fell over the guests. Hitherto I have been praising the Atlicaligui for the excellence of their breeding, but in one or two points I am afraid the *superchic* of European society will have his admiration turned into disgust. The sign that Amu made implied the conclusion of the meal, and immediately a crowd of servants handed to every guest a fresh napkin, a vase of water, and an instrument which I found out to be meant for a tooth-brush ! Thus equipped, the company solemnly set to work to wash their faces and clean their teeth. The effect of the dental washing process was thoroughly comical. The extreme gravity with which both ladies and gentlemen performed the operation upset my equilibrium, and as Gillett unfortunately caught sight of my facial struggles to preserve an air of decorum at this juncture, it set him off, with the result of a peal of ringing laughter resounding through the hall ! This was evidently an almost unpardonable breach of etiquette, for Amu

looked up with an air of haughty surprise. After staring at us for some time, in which uncomfortable proceeding the whole of his guests joined, his wrath cooled down, and instead of ordering our removal, contented himself with administering a rebuke.

"My uncles have an excuse in not being aware of the customs of the nobles of Chalco," he said. "They are strangers, or they would know that to laugh or speak until the chief lights his cigar is to insult their host."

The doctor, who had speedily recovered control over his features, stood up with an ample apology.

"Lord of the Diamond Cross," he said, "we have offended through ignorance, for our ways are different from yours. In the country we come from, it is proper to testify our appreciation of the host's hospitality by loud laughter, which signifies that the good things provided have brought joy and gladness to the hearts of the guests. Nevertheless, as it is our desire to conform to the manners of the nobles of Chalco, we will in future refrain from our innocent mirth."

"All white men are liars," I quoted at the doctor as he resumed his seat.

"Don't be a fool!" whispered Gillett irritably. "Be quiet, for Anu is going to speak."

"I should be guilty of courtesy towards a guest, did I require him to lay aside the customs in which he has been educated," said our host. "Besides, I like the simple, mirthful custom, and therefore ordain that it shall be a law in this palace for visitors to laugh at the conclusion of a meal. The manners of my uncles shall be the manners of my tribe."

"And very bad manners they will be too, if they follow your example," said Gillett to me in an aside.

To get out of one dilemma, the doctor had landed us all into another. From this time we were forced several times daily to pump up a laugh, in which we were joined by those

sitting at table with us, and the absurdity of the whole business on many occasions almost sent me off into uncontrollable fits. But the doctor had learned a lesson in keeping his self-possession, and he therefore angrily lectured me in private on the danger of my want of circumspection, pointing out that if we incurred the resentment of Amu our lives would not be worth a day's purchase.

When the guests had finished their ablutions, chocolate flavoured with vanilla was handed round in tortoise-shell cups, as well as an intoxicating drink of a slightly acid but most agreeable taste. Then Amu stood up and invoked the blessing of Xexuteotl, after which he lighted his cigar, and talk and laughter now became general.

The Chalconian tobacco was very good, and I thoroughly enjoyed the small cigars which were placed beside me on a porcelain salver together with a silver tube, which I found in universal use, as the people seem to have a prejudice against putting the tobacco directly into their mouths.

The ladies withdrew from the table when smoking commenced. But they did not entirely leave us, for they congregated in a brilliantly-lighted saloon at the far side of the pillars, where they amused themselves with dancing to the sound of musical instruments or with playing many curious games. It looked like a scene out of fairyland to Gillett and me, and we watched with keen enjoyment the light and airy forms flitting to and fro with exquisite grace and modesty.

"We have dropped from a planet called earth to a star known as Elysium," I exclaimed rapturously, forgetting for the moment that some of this Elysian people were thirsting to immolate us.

"They are very beautiful," answered the doctor with a sigh, meaning, I imagine, the graceful group of girls his eyes were fixed upon.

"How did you get on with your partner during dinner?" I asked.

"Superbly. Eruna has none of that vulgar curiosity so perplexing to travellers; she is simple, modest, and unaffected—a perfect pattern to some of our English girls. Just watch her now as she is executing that graceful figure. What pose, what elegance in her every movement! See how beautiful is the curve of the mastoid muscle as her head is turned slightly to the right; how admirably the flexor muscles stand—"

"Spare me the dissection of your lovely Eruna!" I hastily interrupted. "Do not vivisect her before the eyes of her uncle, or I shall die of grief."

"But I am merely using these anatomical terms from an artistic—"

"Bosh!" I interrupted irreverently.

"You have no soul!" muttered the doctor rather huffily.

"Not for the application of your barbarous scientific terms to such things of beauty as are moving over yonder, living incarnations of peace, beauty, and gladness."

"Your limited education is a curse!" said the doctor. "Did you but know the merest rudiments of Anatomy and Physiology, you would not only look upon these girls as pretty, but you would also grasp the secret of how their prettiness consisted in a complex combination of multitudinous lines and curves."

"I can see the lines and curves as well as you," I replied. "The only difference is that, whereas you give them outlandish names, I only class them together under one generic title—Beauty."

I am passionately enamoured of the saltatory art, and nothing would have pleased me better than to have encircled the fair Oosita's waist and have guided her through the giddy maze. I suggested that we should therefore join the ladies and teach them a waltz or lancers.

"You will earn the contempt of every man in Chalco if you do," said the doctor.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because dancing is regarded as a female accomplishment here, and not fit for the male sex. I learned this from Eruna during dinner."

"Then I must look and long," I said with a sigh of disappointment.

Amu now drew us into conversation with himself and a few of his intimate friends. We detailed for their benefit the history of our journey to Chalco and the object which induced us to undertake it; and then gathered from their comment and remarks that they literally believed us to be the brothers of Desmonde. We did not think fit to undeceive them on this point, though had they asked us to explain the curious fact of our being able to survive our relative for more than two hundred years, I am afraid we should have looked rather foolish. Fortunately, the white men had earned for themselves the character of being demoniacal both in power and vice, and it is to this circumstance that I attribute the readiness of our friends to swallow this pill of longevity. When we had assented to all the marvels which their credulity could invent concerning us, they one and all rose, touched us on the forehead, acknowledged reverently our common kinship, and promised to protect us to the utmost of their power. Then Gillett had to produce Desmonde's diary, which was passed from hand to hand and recognized to be identical with other documents in his writing, which were carefully preserved in their pyramid temple. We learned that the Deesmunxiatli regarded the language of their progenitor as sacred, and, as such, only used it during their religious observances, whereas in daily life they spoke the ordinary Aticaliguian. The guests had talked in English this evening in deference to their uncles.

Thus in Munchausen-like conversation with our host and his friends, the night wore on and the visitors began to depart, each one touching us on the forehead as he

went. When the last had gone, the Lady Amu and her daughters bade us adieu in the same manner, and I ventured to imagine that a dusky blush pervaded the olive cheeks of Oosita as she performed this ceremony to me. The idea was probably only conjured up by a too vivid imagination, but my wish was parent to it, for there was something so inexplicably natural and refined in this lovely girl that she irresistibly fascinated and attracted me as the magnet does the steel.

Amu, followed by a score of attendants, escorted us to our chamber, which we occupied together at our express wish, fearing that separation might be the prelude to treachery. As soon as we were alone we stepped into the verandah, and were delighted to see our Indians encamped in the courtyard. Our host had kept his word, and had placed them there to guard our apartment.

We went down the few steps to speak to Chotil, who, perceiving us, came forward with a face beaming with delight.

"Ah, master," he exclaimed excitedly, "thou art a mighty Machi, for thou hast taken us away from the dark earth to the bright realms of Pillan!"

"You are still on earth," answered Gillett. "You are only half-way to the happy hunting-grounds, where enmity ceases and all men live as brothers. This land I have brought you to overflows with gold and precious stones, but it is a land of magic. Beware, therefore, of offending the Tlilcoatli, and warn your men not to stray into their quarter, for they will seek to sacrifice us to their goddess."

"But surely this must be the kingdom of Pillan!" urged Chotil. "Everything here seems happiness and wealth."

"You are wrong," said Gillett. "The Great Spirit does not adorn his palaces with gold, but with materials inconceivably more beautiful. This is the earthly city of Chalco,

where we have a dangerous enemy to guard against, and much may depend upon your vigilance."

Somewhat crestfallen, the Indian chief expressed his determination to keep a careful watch, and we returned to our room. After minutely examining our revolvers, we threw ourselves upon luxurious feather-beds and were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

THROUGH CHALCO, CITY OF GEMS.

WE were up by daylight the next morning, and having inspected our Indians, strolled into the well-kept gardens whose shady trees temptingly allured us to wander beneath their green canopies. We passed huge aviaries of gorgeously-plumed birds, most of which were strangers to us, and came upon a miniature lake, on whose bank was a tastefully-decorated summer-house with large soft cushions to recline upon, and meditate or sleep during the hot hours of the day.

"This is a spot fit either for a Stoic or an Epicurean," said Gillett admiringly.

"It is just the resting-place for men who have been leading a nomad life for so long," I replied. "There is, notwithstanding the everlasting glitter of gold, such an air of home-like comfort about Amu's palace, that I should feel perfectly contented were it not for that confounded evil-visaged Ambouli."

"I have a presentiment that he will not work us the harm you imagine," said Gillett. "It strikes me that when he hears we have been received with open arms by the chiefs of the Deesmunxiatli, he will think twice before risking an open rupture with Amu. If the man is governed by reason and not by malice, we shall hear no more about our being offered up to the Serpent goddess."

"I wish I could believe as you do," I answered. "But,

unfortunately, Oosita dwelt too much upon his power and savagery for me to adopt your comfortable doctrine."

"Pooh, man!" said the doctor contemptuously. "Don't pin your faith too much to the silly prattle of the first girl you come across. They say the most improbable and absurd things simply for the sake of making conversation."

"In your eagerness to reassure me, you forget the politeness due to the fair sex."

"Not a bit of it, Wrenforth. You haven't got sisters, and I have. Consequently I know their ways and customs very much better than you do."

"Well, I only hope you may be right," I replied rather dejectedly. "Anyhow, we shall know what to do if——"

"Look towards the palace!" interrupted Gillett. "Whatever can that extraordinary procession mean?"

I looked in the direction indicated, and saw a venerable, long-bearded old man, clad in snow-white garments heavily fringed with gold, advancing towards us at the head of a number of men dressed in a similar fashion. Walking with them, I also recognized Amu and a few of the nobles we had been introduced to the night before. As they made straight for us, we had no doubt but that we were the objects they were searching for, so we stood perfectly still until they confronted us by the side of the summer-house. The venerable old man looked at us inquiringly, but so kindly that we both made him a thorough British bow, which, though not Chalconian politeness, he had the sense to see was meant as a welcome.

"I am here by the command of Cephren, the Beloved of Ra-teotl," began the stranger. "He sent unto me, Sethi, the high priest of the Lord of Light, desiring me to see and converse with the foreigners who have entered his territory and yet live."

"We came unto Deesmunx, our brother," answered Gillett. "But, alas, time has not spared him; he is gathered to his fathers, and we are left to mourn him."

A murmur of sympathy arose from the Deesmunxiatl nobles as the doctor uttered his speech in most lachrymose tones. The high priest regarded him with sharp, eagle eyes as if he were half inclined to think him a fraud.

"How didst thou find the road hither?" asked Sethi suddenly.

"From the directions given by Deesmunx in his sacred writing," answered Gillett, producing at the same time the invaluable journal.

"It is the writing of our great ancestor," said Amu, in corroboration of the doctor's statement.

Whilst Gillett was holding out the book for inspection, I noticed that the priest stared fixedly at his hand. Even after Amu had finished speaking, he seemed so absorbed in his contemplation of the doctor's outstretched fingers that he forgot to ask another question for some moments.

Presently he woke from his reverie, and abruptly asked, "Knowest thou the road of the Hieroglyph?"

"I know not whether we came by it or not," answered Gillett. "Our road is traced here in a map by Deesmunx."

The priest took the map and examined it carefully; then he shook his head and exclaimed, "Nay, that is not the secret road, although thou hast passed very close to it. Tell me," he continued, "didst thou see the image of divine Ra in thy wanderings?"

"I saw Osiris guarding the swamps," answered Gillett gravely.

"Thou hast an amulet on thy finger," continued the priest. "Canst thou read the inscription?"

"Certainly," replied the doctor. "It is a *scarabæus* I obtained from the temple of Amun-Ra at Thebes, and the inscription is 'Ra, Lord of Truth, rising in all lands.'"

I thought the priest was going to have an attack of apoplexy, for his body shook and his face grew purple with excitement. Several times he tried to speak, but his voice

failed him. At last he sufficiently mustered his emotion to exclaim—

"Thou art a messenger from the birthplace of Ra, thou art his hierophant come to bring me good tidings from the sacred land of Chemi. The Tlilcoatli shall never prevail against thee, for thou art no stranger, but a brother to the Deesmunxiatl and a brother to the royal tribe of Ra-teotl."

"Whatever does this all mean?" I said to Gillett, perfectly astounded at the easy manner in which he slipped into positions of great friendship with men who came out to him with hostile intentions.

"The light dawns upon me," answered the doctor. "Listen to what I say to the priest, and you will understand." Then, turning to Sethi, he said, "Art thou a descendant of those mighty hierophants of Chemi whose wisdom was the admiration of mankind?"

"I am!" answered Sethi proudly. "From the day when my ancestor was the pontiff in the temple at Necheb until now, the line of the priesthood has remained unbroken. My eldest son will succeed when Ra-teotl calls me to himself."

"Where is Necheb?" asked Gillett.

"The city of Athoth is in Chemi," answered the priest.

"In Egypt," exclaimed the doctor excitedly. "Then your ancestor was one of the first colonists in the land we now call Mexico?"

"Thou sayest," replied Sethi. "But the country is called Olmi in the hieratic papyri."

"I shall have much to say to thee concerning this," said Gillett. "Let us be brothers and meet again to talk of thine ancient land by the Nile, and of the gods thy forefathers worshipped there."

"Most willingly," replied the priest, almost dancing with excitement. "Wilt thou come now to the temple of Ra-teotl? Thou shalt enter the most sacred shrine."

At this point Amu interfered, and after telling Sethi that his guests had not yet broken their fast, invited him to sit down with us. The priest accepted, and soon the procession was wending its way to the palace, every person composing it regarding both Gillett and myself with a great deal of awe, which we accepted with becoming dignity. During the meal, which was almost as sumptuous as the dinner the night before, it was arranged that we should visit the pyramid of Ra-teotl on the following evening, for Amu was desirous of showing us over the city this morning, his duties on the frontier giving him but scant time to play the part of host.

I was slightly disappointed that the ladies did not put in an appearance, and I cast many a searching glance at the curtained doorway, hoping to see the fair form of Oosita standing there. But the meal came to an end, and the master of the ceremonies announced the arrival of a small phalanx of Deesmunxiatl warriors who had been ordered to accompany us in our tour of the city. At this announcement, Amu rose, invoked the blessing of Xexuteotl, and then led the way to the courtyard, whilst I followed, half angry at being unable to pay my respects to the ladies for several hours to come.

I have before stated that Chalco was built in the form of a parallelogram, two thousand feet above sea level, on the top of a hill which would have been a perfect cone if nature had not deprived it of its apex. The site of the city was thus a perfectly smooth plateau, and owing to its elevation, enjoyed a climate free from the extreme heat of the plains below. All around, but divided from Chalco by deep, impracticable chasms, rose numerous quartz hills of truncated cones, whose position so commanded the city that it could not have stood an hour's bombardment from modern artillery. But the Atlicaligui probably never dreamed of there being any other engines of war more powerful than the *balistæ*, *catapultæ*, or *scorpiones*, which

had served their forefathers thousands of years ago, and therefore felt perfectly secure against all attack in their high and isolated fortress.

The parallelogram was divided into four quarters, the two northerly being occupied by the populous tribe of the Serpent-worshippers ; the south-eastern by the Deesmuntiatli ; and the south-western by the royal race of Ra-teotl. In the very centre of the town was the grand square, in which was situated the King's palace, and an enormous pyramidal temple of which our friend Sethi was the high priest. From each side of the square, two roads proceeded which gradually converged until they united to form one broad thoroughfare at a short distance from the fortifications, and terminating in the continuous road called the "Street of the Ramparts." Each quarter of the city had also its central square and pyramid, from which issued roads in the same manner as from the grand square.

Thus, the city, seen from the neighbouring hills, presented the appearance of a series of stars, the white quartz outlines of which indicated the streets rigidly converging towards one of the four points of the compass. The flashing of the golden roofs in the bright sunbeams kept up the illusion by seeming to be rays of light emitted from the stellar objects.

The beehive style of architecture has already been described, and it only remains to say that in the humblest houses we visited, everything, including their owners, was scrupulously neat and clean ; indeed, the frequent use of baths was one of the prominent virtues of this singularly refined people.

During our progress through Amu's quarter, we saw that our advent was the cause of intense excitement and curiosity, yet we could not fail to notice that the people studiously refrained from crowding round, or in any way indulging in a noisy exhibition of their feelings ; they contented themselves with raising their right forefinger above

their heads as a sign of amity and welcome. This reception was so different to the clamorous demonstrations usually offered to a "lion" by civilized communities, that I could not help expressing my pleasure to Amu at the orderly conduct of his people.

"Had you been entirely alone and unprotected, you would have received just the same respectful treatment," answered my host, evidently pleased with the implied compliment.

I mention this incident as a proof of the marvellous good breeding of even the plebeians of Chalco. Such manners are not to be found in any European city; indeed, I have more than once interfered in the streets of charitable, philanthropic London, to save a poor Indian or Chinaman from the most brutal ill-usage at the hands of my own fellow-countrymen.

We had sauntered slowly through the Deesmuniatl quarter, and were crossing into that occupied by the royal tribe, when Gillett caught sight of the vast pyramid in the grand square, and begged Amu to conduct him there.

"That is the one request I am forced to refuse," said the lord of the Diamond Cross. "Until you receive a summons to the royal presence, the square must remain a sealed book to you under a penalty of five years' service in the mines."

"But I ought to have known of this before," said Gillett. "Under these circumstances, I do not thin' I shall be very eager to pay my promised visit to Sethi."

"He will fetch thee by night and throw the emblems of Ra-teotl around thee," answered Amu. "Thus disguised, there is no need for fear."

We looked longingly at the massive heathen temple as we crossed the broad road that led to it, and then, as a set-off to our disappointment, expressed a wish to visit the quarters of our enemies, the Tlilcoatli. Amu complied with our request, and ordered his men to form a hollow

wedge, into which we and the officers entered. This was done, I understood, not from any fear of being attacked, but as a method of showing that the Deesmunxiatli were not on good terms with the tribe of Serpent-worshippers.

Anxious to see whether the same cleanliness prevailed here as amongst our host's clan, we asked and obtained permission to enter one of the humble dwellings. Having saluted the owner by poking him on the forehead with our fingers, after the manner of the Atlicaligui, we passed through the doorway into the atrium.

Even this abode looked like a miniature palace, and the doctor began expressing his oft-repeated opinion that Chalco was a veritable city of Elysium, when I happened to cast my eyes over the doorways leading to the inner apartments. The sight I beheld froze me with horror, for, festooned from the ceiling were six pendants of human skulls, intermixed with arm and thigh bones! With a shudder of disgust, I directed Gillett's attention to the ghastly paraphernalia. He regarded them coolly enough, and it was only after a closer inspection that his *sang-froid* deserted him.

"By Jove, they study anatomy here with a vengeance!" he exclaimed. "This is not a museum, but a charnel-house, where every bone reminds the good man of the house of some revenge successfully paid off. I was in Olympus a moment ago, but I have fallen with the rapidity of lightning to Hades. Just look at that indentation on this thigh-bone, caused, I imagine, by a pretty smart spear-thrust. Here also is a skull with a tremendous fracture. None of the original owners of these osseous relics have died a natural death, and I therefore conclude that these gentlemanly Tlilcoatli are in the habit of mutilating their dead enemies for the purpose of obtaining these hideous mementos of the battle-field wherewith to adorn their atria."

"Let us only hope that the mutilations are practised on

the dead and not on the living," I exclaimed, as a cold, creepy sensation spread over me.

"What a fearful contrast this is, between the refinement of the descendants of Desmonde and the brutal savagery of Ambouli's followers," said Gillett. "Yet, outwardly, the Tlilcoatl seem as civilized as our friends, although I suppose they require very little inducement to throw off the varnish of politeness and reveal the devil within."

"They probably exemplify the saying, 'Scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tartar,'" I replied. "But, for goodness' sake, let us get out of this horrible den, or I shall be ill."

As we emerged into the open air, Amu evidently guessed by the pallor of my face that I had seen an unwelcome sight.

"Have my uncles seen the trophies of the Tlilcoatl?" he inquired.

"Yes," I replied. "I have seen a sight I never expected to see in Chalco, and these brutal ruffians have no right to live side by side with the more polished inhabitants, but ought to be swept off the face of the earth. They are a foul blot on your magnificent civilization."

"Fortunately, these trophies are many hundred years old," said Amu. "We have had no wars since Chalco became a city, to enable the Serpent-worshippers to accumulate fresh human decorations for their houses. But their priests are enabled to keep up a small supply by dismembering the bodies of those condemned to die on the sacrificial stone."

"It is horrible!" I exclaimed. "The Tlilcoatl are fiends in human form."

"Your sentiments do honour to the doctrines taught by Deesmunx," said Amu. "He requires us to pay every respect to the mortal remains even of our enemies; he commands quarter to be given to every wounded or disarmed foe, and specially warns us against the perpetration of cruelty or torture on man or beast; for, as he wrote in

his sacred book, Xexuteotl created them both and gave to each the capacity to feel pleasure and pain; if pain is hateful to man, so it is to the brute, and as Xexuteotl wishes His creation to live together in harmony, the true worshipper is he who strives to abolish any form of cruelty. The followers of Ra-teotl are by nature humane, and they have willingly adopted our code; but these savage worshippers of a demon goddess know not the name of mercy, and refuse to be weaned from their atrocious customs. It was an evil day for the race of Olmec when the white man drove the barbarians hither. Cheerfully would we attempt to banish them from our territory, but they are too strong, and even if we succeeded, we fear that they would in revenge betray us to the pale-faces, whose greed for gold and jewels we have heard too much of."

"You dread the white man more than the Tlilcoatli!" I exclaimed.

"We do," replied our host. "The only god he reveres is Wealth, and to obtain that he would think nothing of exterminating whole nations. As for the Serpent-worshippers, though we know they are naturally as cruel as the pale-face, yet it is to their interest to obey our laws and respect the peace, for the moment they cease to do this, the foreigner will enter and involve all the tribes in a common ruin."

"I regret that your feeling against the white man should be so bitter," I replied. "Cruelty is as hateful to us as to you, and I experienced an inexpressible sensation of relief at hearing that you and your people regard these Tlilcoatli with the same disgust as we do. It would indeed be a strange thing if it were possible for the refinement and urbanity of the Deesmunxiatl to go hand in glove with the degrading habits of ferocious savages."

"You only do us justice," answered Amu. "And your sentiments begin to make me feel more lenient towards your race."

Whilst I was thus talking to our host, a strange idea began to ferment in my brain, and it originated by noticing the humanity and piety which animated him and his followers, and by gathering from his lips a code of ethics so simple yet so sublime that they could belong to no other cult but that of the Christian. Was it possible that when Desmonde was deified by this extraordinary people, he took the opportunity of proclaiming a new religion, which was the faith of Jesus? He married a wife from the royal tribe of Ra-teotl, and had children whom he sedulously instructed in Christianity. As his descendants multiplied, they adhered to his doctrines, so that at the present day, Gillett and I were, unknowingly, the guests of a small sect of isolated followers of the Cross! Of course, all this was mere conjecture, but still the device of the tribe, a St. Andrew's cross, helped it on by seeming to be the badge of their religion, just as the serpent was worn by the Tlilcoatli as a sign of their hideous cult.

Impelled by something more than mere idle curiosity, I questioned Amu closely as to the tenets of his faith, and ascertained with genuine pleasure that my surmises were right. United to a Puritanical simplicity of doctrine was a gorgeous ritual, not to be wondered at in a people of ardent imagination and fond of display. Desmonde had well profited by the sufferings he underwent in the dungeons of the Inquisition at Potosi, for Amu told me that the keynote of his religious system, as enunciated in the sacred writings, was mercy.

Gillett and I were as delighted at this discovery as those European travellers must have been when they found the same thing amongst the Abyssinians; and when we imparted the fact of the identity of our worship to Amu, his joy knew no bounds. He begged us to enter the *teocalli* of Xexuteotl, a name which I now began to recognize as the Indianized form of Jesus-God; and as we impatiently hurried out of the Tlilcoatl quarter he told

us that no heathen had ever yet desecrated its hallowed precincts ; but to the brothers of Deesmunx all was open, even the Holy of Holies, which none but the lord of the Diamond Cross might enter.

The *teocalli*, or pyramid, was not of large proportions, and could not attempt to vie with the massive splendour of that dedicated to Ra-teotl. There was no stairway around its exterior leading to the summit, as was the case with that devoted to the adoration of the serpent. Space for the congregation was found in the interior, where they worshipped with closed doors, free from the prying eye of the curious.

As we entered the Christian pyramid we both immediately remarked at the east end a huge cross of tortoise-shell and diamonds, suspended over an elaborately-decorated altar. No pains or expense had been spared to beautify the house of prayer, for the walls were completely tapestryed with superb feather-work, and even the seats were upholstered in beautifully-coloured stuffs. From the roof were suspended numerous golden candelabra, profusely sprinkled with the precious tin, and the floor glittered with mosaic patterns.

As our chief anxiety was to examine the relics of Desmonde, we did not remain long in the body of the church, but hurried our conductor into a side chapel, which was completely cut off from the rest of the building by a heavy golden door. This was the Holy of Holies, the shrine of Desmonde, and the depository of all his sacred writings. A curious yellow light illuminated the interior of the sanctuary, admitted through long strips of coloured glass set deep in the thick walls. On stone shelves around the room were laid numerous volumes of manuscript written in the quaint, cramped style of the seventeenth century, and on which the doctor's eagle eye immediately pounced. The material upon which the industrious author had so permanently fixed his thoughts was linen hardened with a

vegetable substance, and also a kind of papyrus prepared from the American aloe. The unfortunate exile had evidently tried to write down all he could remember of the Bible, and the Deesmunxiatl had always esteemed the most hallowed of his writings to be that which we recognized as a nearly exact reproduction of the Sermon on the Mount, the blessings it promised to the just, the merciful, the humble, and the charitable, being the corner-stone of the sublime faith he had endeavoured to inculcate into his children and their descendants. A collection of moral maxims, isolated quotations from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and many of the Psalms faithfully rendered, filled most of the other books.

"Desmonde had not much to regret in his enforced retirement from the busy, battling world of his day," said Gillett. "Solitude brought reflection, and reflection wisdom. He here learned to number his days, and consequently sought after that hidden treasure which was his sure passport to the heavenly city. His latter days must have been happy, peaceful, and free from that gnawing regret which is so palpable on every page of his diary."

"He was a good man," I answered in subdued tones. "His earnest piety has borne excellent fruit in the modesty, refinement, and amiable characteristics of his numerous progeny."

Amu now led us to one end of the apartment, and drew aside the costly feather-work curtains which draped it, revealing the mausoleum of his great sire. Here were two sarcophagi of pure gold; that which contained the embalmed remains of Desmonde was adorned with large, lozenge-shaped pieces of tin, a distinction permitted only to a king, high priest, or chief of a tribe; the second coffin had one circular piece of tin on its lid, and contained the body of Buttler. Suspended over the sarcophagi were the two pistolets mentioned in the diary as having been received from a Spanish hunter who had compassionated

their forlorn state during their wanderings. They were antique, clumsy-looking weapons, and seemed more capable of doing harm to their possessor than to an enemy. From the arabesque designs carved on their stocks, I could almost imagine that they dated from the time when Boabdil, the Moorish King of Granada, was making his desperate struggle against the victorious arms of Ferdinand the Catholic.

Some of Desmonde's garments were also preserved, and it was touching to note how he clung to the last to the fashions of his country. Although they were made of thin fabric on account of the tropical heat, yet lace and ruffles, slashed coats, and plumed beavers were all there, a standing monument of the Caroline era in this out-of-the-world corner of South America.

We left the pyramid church with feelings softened and subdued by our inspection of these relics of frail mortality. A deep sympathy was aroused for the poor exile whose heart had almost broken when he found that escape from Chalco was impossible, when he knew for certain that his dearly-loved sisters in beautiful Devon would never greet him again. Had our host asked me to write an epitaph on his sarcophagus I should have inscribed these words, "He lived and suffered, but not in vain." As I looked at Amu, his lineal descendant, I felt that the inscription would be a truthful one, for here was his noble scion sprung from his own knightly house, and well worthy of upholding the ancestral dignity of the Desmondes—a man admirably fitted by education, refinement, and gentility to assume the lordship of his valiant clan. As we knew him more and more intimately, we often expressed our regret that the talents of so able a chief were hidden in the petty kingdom of Chalco instead of being utilized in the service of England.

I was thoroughly tired out by the time we re-entered Amu's palace, and my eyes ached from the intense glitter

and glare caused by the sun sparkling on so much quartz and gold. Gillett suffered in the same way also, and suggested the advisability of our taking to neutral-tinted spectacles as a means of preventing some serious damage to the eyesight. Any one would imagine that the citizens of Chalco, from being constantly exposed to the bright and dazzling glare, would suffer from some great defect of vision, but Gillett proved, to his own astonishment, that such was not the case.

A luxurious shower-bath effectually removed my fatigue, and leaving the doctor to smoke a cigar and post up his diary, I sauntered into the atrium, where the master of the ceremonies met me, and intimated the desire of the ladies to receive me in their *chimirco*, an apartment answering to our modern drawing-room.

I was delighted at the invitation, and eagerly followed my conductor up the golden stairway into a fair-sized room, which would have been exceedingly tasteful had it not been spoiled by the heavy, cumbrous furniture, which seemed ancient enough to have been designed in the palmy days of the Egyptian Pharaohs. Amongst the numerous ornaments which especially attracted my observation were figures of various animals in gold and silver; and the manner in which the metals were mixed so that the feathers of a bird or the scales of a fish were alternately gold and silver, seemed so ingenious that I felt that our artisans had something to learn from the Atlicaligui. A couple of silver vases, so enormous that I could not encircle them with my arms, also extorted my admiration, not only on account of their size, but because of their fantastic and delicate carving. Each one of them must have been the labour of a long lifetime.

I was received most graciously by the ladies, whose previous distrust and fear had just been thoroughly dissipated by Amu having informed them of the identity of our religions. As I sipped my chocolate and discoursed

of the strange things we had in my own country, little shudders of terror or merry bursts of laughter alternately seized the fair audience. It was delightful to see the smiles dimpling sweet Oosita's face ; they seemed to transform her from a child of earth to a happy angel of light, and I therefore chose those subjects which kept her features in a perpetual ripple of beauty. I had been getting on famously for over an hour when the curtains were parted, and the major-domo announced another visitor in the shape of that miserable Gillett. I don't suppose I looked particularly pleased when I caught his eye, for he muttered as he passed, "Thought to steal a march on me, did you ?" To which silly whisper I merely returned an exclamation of impatience. Nevertheless, I contrived to monopolize Oosita, sat next to her at dinner, muttered a few uncomely words when she went to join her companions in the dance afterwards, and retired to bed with the full assurance that the charming little maiden felt as well disposed towards me as she would be to a brother.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SACRED ANACONDA.

THE next morning Amu departed from Chalco, his military duties requiring his presence on the frontier, which was rigidly guarded night and day in order to exclude strangers. So severely was this duty carried out, and so important did it seem in the eyes of the Atlicaligui, that no officer was permitted to absent himself for more than two days during the whole term of his month's service. The efficiency with which this task was performed was well known to us, for we had not been able to penetrate five hundred yards into the forbidden territory without attracting the vigilance of the guards. We could not help regretting the absence of our host, for his enlightened conversation and superb manners at once commanded our admiration and won our esteem. But we did not find the time hang heavily on our hands, for we had plenty to occupy us in observing, with ever-deepening interest, the strange customs of this wonderful people.

A disappointment, which Gillett felt more keenly than I did, occurred from the sudden indisposition of the high priest of Ra-teótl, thereby postponing for some time our visit to the great pyramid. I was not so deeply learned in hieroglyphs as the doctor, and therefore was surprised at the irritability he evinced at having to wait a few days longer before he could satisfactorily solve the mystery of the origin of the Atlicaligui—a nation which seemed to

possess every indication of having sprung from the land of the Nile.

Whilst Gillett employed the days of grace thus given him in improving his hieratic knowledge during the tropical noonday heat, I enjoyed a week of delightful laziness. Yet I am wrong in calling it all laziness, for I found that I could be energetic enough when in the society of my charming princess ; but, alas, our interviews were not frequent enough to call forth the latent sentimentality of my character, and when we were together, all impetuosity had to be subdued owing to the presence of the Lady Amu or Eruna.

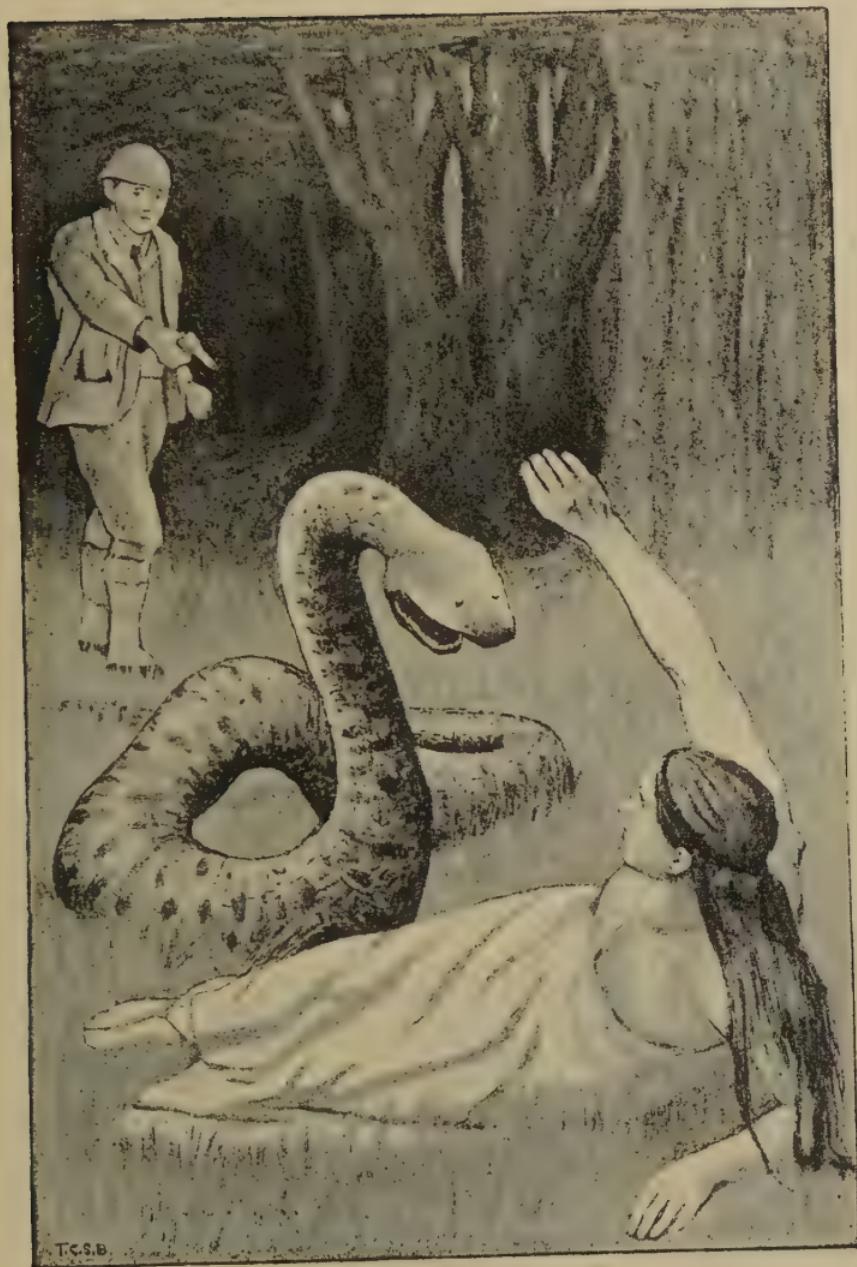
Towards the end of the week, I took it into my head to while away the hours of oppressive heat in the shady arbour belonging to the gardens of the palace. It was a perfect paradise for coolness, contentment, and luxurious ease, being overshadowed by lovely foliage, dense enough to exclude the burning rays of the sun, and filled with the soft, musical murmurs of a sparkling cascade, which discharged its limpid stream into the artificial lake at my feet. I found this charming retreat so much to my liking, that I came regularly every morning to enjoy the excellent El Dorado cigar, and meditate and contemplate as if I were a veritable hermit. On the third day of my retirement from the world, I did less meditation than usual, for the heat, combined with the sweet monotony of falling water, had such a sleep-compelling effect that I gradually sank off into a delicious slumber, in which I seemed to hear the far-off murmur of happy voices singing blithely in unison.

The melodious sounds lulled me into perfect repose, and imparted a dreamy sensation of being wafted by gentle zephyrs to Elysian halls, whose atmosphere was a soft, half-audible music. Suddenly discordant notes resounded with hideous clang through the restful harmonies, as if the tumult of the abyss had invaded the realms of peace. Again and again they rang out so loudly and persistently,

that I became wide awake on the instant, and, starting up, seized the revolver which had been my bosom companion ever since I left Lima. There was no mistaking the import of those sounds; they were cries of terror or distress proceeding from a female.

Once again the cry of agony disturbed the still air, and a horrible fear that the voice was Oosita's gave wings to my feet as I flew down the winding path. As I emerged from a group of cedars, the whole scene burst upon my horrified gaze. A huge Anaconda was confronting Oosita, and almost in the act of enclosing her lovely form in his muscular coils. I shouted, hoping to distract the serpent's attention to myself, but the hideous brute was too certain of his prey to pay the least regard to my invitation. Seeing immediately the failure of this ruse, there was nothing else to be done but to use the revolver promptly, although I ran considerable risk of wounding the poor terrified girl. Fortunately the snake had not yet grasped her with his formidable teeth, but he would do so in less than a second. There was consequently no time for deliberation, unless I desired to see as fair a princess as ever graced this earth a crushed and mutilated corpse. Summoning all my nerve and resolution, I raised the weapon and fired. More by luck than careful aim, the shot penetrated the monster's head and brought it to the ground, which its huge, hideous-looking body lashed in all the terrible but impotent fury of death. With a mighty cry of gladness and relief, I rushed forward and snatched Oosita from the contamination of the reptile; then lifting her, trembling and half fainting in my arms, carried her to the soft cushions of my arbour, now a hermitage no longer.

To my regret, this maiden of El Dorado recovered her presence of mind much more rapidly than her European sister would have done under similar circumstances; nor did she require sal-volatile or any of those aids to recovery which are deemed an absolute necessity in the civilized



T.C.S.B.

A huge Anaconda was confronting Oosita.—p. 194.

world, and without which I believe some young ladies would consider it their duty to keep up the faint for the rest of their days. I regretted that she was not more like these fashionable belles, solely because she was enabled to dispense with my tender *soins* much sooner than I cared to give them up. Soon, too soon, she raised her trembling lids, but the look in her bewitching eyes as she fixed them on mine, thrilled me with delight, and sent a soft, exquisite tremor through me.

"Thank God you are safe," I exclaimed, kneeling beside her, and taking one of her dear little hands into mine.

"My words are too feeble to express the gratitude I feel towards you for saving my life," said Oosita in her sweet, broken, Italian-English. "I had quite given myself up for lost, when your voice roused me to hope."

"Providence must have sent me to this summer-house on purpose to watch over you," I replied. "Had you met your enemy four days ago, the consequences would have been very serious."

I shuddered with horror as I pictured to myself the terrible fate from which Oosita had had such a hairbreadth escape; had my arrival on the scene been delayed for even three or four seconds longer, this beautiful creature would have been—— But the picture was too horrible, too vivid, to pursue any longer, and I forced myself free from its hideous spell, by turning to the trembling girl at my side, and caressing her shapely hand as if to convince myself that its owner was still a living personality.

"Your hand trembles as well as mine," she presently remarked, as her bewitching eyes once more fascinated me with their soft and tender expression.

"I tremble at the thought of what might have happened," I answered, with a ring of passion in my voice. "Ah! promise me, darling, that you will never wander forth alone, for fear of meeting with another of these hideous reptiles!"

I was wrong to use that endearing expression. Chalconian etiquette forbade it, except between betrothed couples ; and the duty I owed to my host forbade it, unless I intended to follow it up with a declaration of love. But men are creatures of impulse ; they allow their hearts to go forth in a flood of affection the moment they see a beautiful woman in distress ; their method of consoling the fair sex is based upon the principle of treating the sweetly piteous one as if she were a sister—and something more.

I began to adopt this plan with Oosita, but the change from a soft, pleading look to a haughty expression, convinced me I had committed an unpardonable error.

"I am sufficiently recovered to return to the palace," she said, attempting to rise and utterly ignoring my previous remark.

I was crushed by her hauteur, which I thought was more suitable to a Lady Clara Vere de Vere than to my bright, winsome princess of Chalco. In silence I held out my hand, but her trembling limbs were not equal to the task of raising herself, and she fell back on the cushions. In vain I besought her to rest a little time longer ; she persisted in her determination, and I was therefore forced, through fear of seeing her totter and fall, to place my arm round her as a support.

At this very interesting juncture I heard the sound of voices and approaching footsteps. I could not withdraw my protecting arm in time, and therefore had the mortification of being caught in this position by the Lady Amu and a crowd of her servants. An angry gleam from the mother's eye warned me that our very close *tête-à-tête* was a serious offence. I prepared myself to receive the attack by gently depositing Oosita on the cushions, and then advancing to the door of the arbour to offer the morning salutation. The Lady Amu waved me back with an imperious gesture, but as I was anxious to arrest the forth-

coming torrent of invective, I paid no heed to it, and forced my greeting upon her by touching her forehead.

"My daughter, the Lady Oosita," she began.

"Is faint and ill from fear," I interposed.

"Then the cries I heard were uttered by her," exclaimed the mother. "But what can have caused them?" she continued, turning upon me a sudden, angry look.

"Come with me, and I will show you," was my reply.

The mother pushed past me and went to her daughter, whom she regarded with some anxiety.

"I am still faint," murmured Oosita. "But he saved me."

"Leave her in peace for a few minutes longer," I said to the Lady Amu. "Whilst she is recovering, I will show you the cause of her terror."

Without waiting for a reply, I took her hand and conducted her down the winding path to where the loathsome reptile was still lying, occasionally agitated by a convulsive muscular twitching, which often remains for hours after life has left the animal.

"I was only just in time to save the Lady Oosita from being crushed to death in the awful embrace of this hideous thing," I remarked, pointing to it.

She regarded the Anaconda with intense aversion; then, with tearful eyes and softened expression, seized my hands in hers.

"May the blessing of Xexuteotl rest on thee for thy brave deed!" she exclaimed pathetically.

A low murmur amongst the servants, beginning in astonishment and ending in terror, made itself heard.

"It is the Sacred Anaconda! Behold the golden emblems on the rings of its tail!"

The Lady Amu started with anxiety, as these words forced themselves upon her ear. She took a few steps forward and bent over the still writhing reptile; then, with an exclamation of dismay, turned slowly round and fixed her eyes on me. I could see from her manner that

something was amiss, and although I was expectant of nothing but praise, yet somehow an uncomfortable chill pervaded me.

"Art thou aware of the terrible penalty thou hast incurred?" she asked in accents rendered tremulous by anxiety.

"There can be no penalty for rescuing a girl from such a monster!" I replied, with increasing feelings of uneasiness.

"Ah! thou knowest not our unjust laws!" said the Lady Amu in pitying tones. "Judging by the commands of Xexuteotl, thou hast done a right good deed. But by the ordinances of the Atlicaligui, thou hast committed a crime, the punishment of which is death!"

"My dear madam!" I exclaimed excitedly, "I am utterly at a loss to understand your meaning. Kindly put me out of this suspense."

"The reptile thou hast killed is the Sacred Serpent of the Tlilcoatl!" said the Lady Amu with trembling voice. "Such sacrilege can only be atoned by death."

"Then why do they let it roam about, when they know the brute is dangerous?" I asked irritably.

"Such a thing has never been heard of before," was the unsatisfactory reply I received.

"It is my belief that it was let loose in these gardens for a specific purpose," I answered angrily. "It is quite probable that Ambouli ordered this to be done so that his horrible serpent might either make a meal of the white men or else involve them in some serious trouble."

"Ambouli is wicked enough to do any cruel thing," said the Lady Amu. "But whether this may have been a snare of his or not, it is certain that you have now incurred the bitter enmity of the whole of his tribe, if they become cognizant of your deed."

I felt particularly uncomfortable at this news, and devoutly hoped that the bloodthirsty Serpent-worshippers

would fail to hear of my sacrilegious performance. But I had already found out that the Atlicaligui were inveterate gossips, and consequently feared that it would not be long before the secret oozed out, notwithstanding that the Lady Amu was, even now, binding her people over to absolute silence on the subject.

The servants swore, with crossed hands, to keep their own counsel; and then, at my suggestion, removed all evidence of the deed by fastening some huge stones to the body of the defunct monster, and casting him into the lake.

It really seemed as if some evil fate or some persistent demon had pursued us from the moment we set foot on the golden territory. I remembered, as I stood watching the loathsome coils of the serpent disappear beneath the surface of the lake, how a strange depression had overcome me on the eve of our first day's journey across the swamps, and I now felt inclined to give some credit to the old adage that "Coming events cast their shadows before." Whilst our lives were still in a very unsafe condition, I had been forced to perpetrate an action which rendered them forfeit without the least prospect of mercy! The presage of woe, which had instilled itself into me, would come true in spite of every human effort to avert its dark omen, and I therefore made up my mind that I, at least, would have to leave my bones for sepulture, or for decoration of the Tlilcoatl houses, in this strange country. I could see no further than the horrible sacrificial stone of the Serpent-worshippers; everything else seemed a dark, blank void which stretched far into the fathomless infinite.

These gloomy forebodings were interrupted by the Lady Amu, who gently placed her hand on my shoulder, and looked into my face with a sweet, gentle expression which vividly reminded me of Oosita.

"Be not sad," she exclaimed. "The Tlilcoatl will seek in vain for the slayer of their monster, for none of my tribe

will betray thee. Be cheerful, therefore, and recover thy spirits with the knowledge that a mother's blessing will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

She spoke in a voice rendered broken by emotion, which confirmed me in my previous opinion that the most ardent affection and happiness reigned in her domestic circle. Indeed, it would have been a wonder had it been otherwise, for the unceasing care with which mothers inculcated moral and religious duties into their children had often struck me with admiration, and therefore I was not so surprised to find that the Deesmunxiatli were without exception upright, truthful, fearless, and affectionate.

"I fear not what Ambouli or his priests can do unto me," I replied. "The thought of their malice does not sadden me, for they shall never stretch me alive on the altar of their infernal goddess."

"My Lord Amu must get you and your followers out of the country, if the death of the Anaconda be discovered," said the distracted mother. "But your noble, fearless deed has placed the whole tribe under such a deep obligation, that every man will now protect your life as if it were his own."

"I value exceedingly your assurance of protection," I replied, "and I only regret that it should be necessary for the performance of an act of common humanity. As I value your daughter's life infinitely more than that of a serpent, I would willingly slaughter every Anaconda in the land rather than a hair of her head should be touched. But there may be more of these ferocious reptiles lurking about the grounds, and I therefore beg you not to allow your daughter to walk here without an escort. In fact, if she is willing, I should only be too happy to place myself at her disposal."

Barely had I finished my sentence when a little hand was laid on my forehead, and, turning round, I perceived Oosita standing by my side. She had evidently been listening to the conversation, and such was the expressive

look in her timid, dark eyes, that I longed, then and there, to take her to my arms. But wisdom counselled prudence, so I restrained the almost overpowering inclination, and contented myself with returning the salutation.

Surely there was something more than gratitude in her sweet look and hesitating, drooping figure? As I gazed at the lovely features, so tender and pathetic, my heart began to beat tumultuously, and an irrepressible wave of passionate feeling swept over me. But this was folly, sheer rank idiocy. A man in my position could not possibly mate with a mixture of English and ancient Egyptian, no matter how superbly lovely and sweet it was! With a resolute effort I struggled to banish these softer thoughts, and return to the ordinary courtesies of every-day life. I discussed, with calmness, the probable course Ambouli would take when he ascertained that I was the perpetrator of the sacrilegious act; I laughed away the Lady Amu's oft-expressed anxiety on my account; I soothed Oosita's fears, and generally behaved like a rational being, although I did not dare to look into those dark, bewitching eyes which I felt fixed upon me all the time!

Such intense resolution could not last very long. When we had arrived at the verandah of the palace, my moral courage evaporated under a stealthy glance I cast at my princess. With extraordinary inconsistency I supplicated the Lady Amu to permit me to attend her daughter every morning in her walks, pleading the insufficiency of swords and spears to deal promptly with dangerous snakes, and extolling the superiority of my "thunder and lightning" revolver.

Her mother not only unsuspiciously acceded to my request, but thanked me with many expressions of gratitude for what she evidently esteemed a most chivalrous offer. Thus it came to pass that Oosita and myself found ourselves wandering daily through the beautiful groves and winding paths of this flower-decked Paradise.

How superbly bright these days were, and how quickly they flew in such companionship! A week spent constantly in her society unveiled all the sweet, childlike simplicity of a nature almost too lovely for our sin-laden planet, and forced me to feel that I was an inferior animal moulded in infinitely coarser clay, and endowed with a mind that could never hope to soar to the heights of her purity. I began to imagine that my journey had been an expedition to discover the lost realms of Paradise, and that I had succeeded in passing Eden's golden gates, and stood in the presence of Eve in all her pristine beauty and innocence, before the tempter's baneful influence transformed her into a creature of sorrow. Her thoughts, ideas, and aspirations were as lovely as the flowers which grew around her, as ethereal as angels' prayers—all spotless, all soul-felt.

Constant contact with such supreme womanly excellence—an excellence based upon perfect purity of motive—could not fail to have its effect upon me, and I occasionally found myself dreamily wondering at the excessive trouble I had often taken to do wrong when it now seemed so much easier and pleasanter to do right! Thus the mere contemplation of Oosita's sweet innocence was sufficient to mightily stir my sluggish conscience, and to sow the first seeds of a moral regeneration. Bright and joyous, an ardent lover of nature, she constantly recalled to my mind the verse of a poem I had culled from an American magazine whilst at Lima—

*"In harmony with birds and flowers,
And angels in their sphere;
And, gifted with immortal powers,
Thou art an angel here."*

The verse seemed to fit accurately my own feelings, for she gave me the impression of being in perfect harmony with everything that is bright, happy, and pure.

Having thus set up my ideal woman, I tried hard to persuade myself that I did not fall down and worship it.

Certainly I forced my tongue to be discreet, but I had a shrewd suspicion that my eyes were not under such good control. They, and not the lingual organ, ought to be denominated the "unruly members." As the days went on, another strange symptom manifested itself, and it consisted in an absolute craving for her presence. I gru'ge l the hours which parted us, and longed, directly we separated, for the time to come again when, seated hand in hand in the arbour, I could cull the pure wisdom of her mind, and gain fresh knowledge from her quaint metaphors and delightful allegories. Notwithstanding all this, I strove hard to convince myself that I was not falling in love—that I merely desired her companionship on account of the new ideas of life she was gradually unfolding to me! But although I thus endeavoured to blind my understanding, I was not eminently successful, and only succeeded in making myself restless and uncomfortable.

Of course the doctor had heard all about my heroic rescue, and subsequent close attendance upon Oosita, although mine was not the tongue which told him, for somehow I dreaded his quizzical look and chaffing manner. But he caught me one afternoon, when a spare hour from attendance on my princess threw me into his society.

"We haven't seen much of each other for the last ten days," he began. "Although we have many things to discuss, I never can get hold of you alone in the daytime, and at night you plead fatigue."

"What have we to discuss?" I asked. "Everything goes on as happily as possible. The King seems to have forgotten our existence, and that rascal Ambouli is following suit, for he has not even made a complaint about my killing his infernal Anaconda! Oh, by the bye, I don't think I told you about that?"

"No, you did not," laughed Gillett, with a cynicism that I hated in him. "But I manage to gather all the news. One little item is, that you have constituted yourself Oosita's

bodyguard, and are seen following her as closely as her shadow, for fear another snake might attempt to clasp her to his reptilian bosom!"

"Don't speak of her in that frivolous manner," I exclaimed angrily.

"Upon my word you don't know what a hero you are," continued Gillett, in the same flippant tone. "The Lady Amu discoursed on your bravery for quite an hour the other day, until I got so weary that I was half inclined to make a diversion by describing the absurd manner in which you howled when you came face to face with another Anaconda in the swamps."

"She would not have believed you!" I answered savagely. "She would only have thought that your malicious tale was dictated by jealousy, because you did not have the chance of saving Oosita."

"Poor little Oosita!" murmured the doctor. "What a blessing it is that the snake did not treat her pretty arm as yours was. Suppose his teeth had fixed themselves into her *extensor communis*—"

"Confound you!" I shouted. "If you dare to apply your vile anatomical language to that sweet child I'll shoot you!"

"It isn't swearing," said the doctor, with an irritating grin. "And I fail to see how my calling a portion of her arm by its scientific name can make her less sweet, or do her the least harm."

"It is a kind of profanation," I answered sullenly.

"Oh-h-h!" ejaculated Gillett, as if a sudden inspiration had at last been permitted to illumine his asinine brains. "Does the wind set that way? Surely you do not mean me to imagine you are meditating making a fool of yourself?"

"Upon my word, Gillett, residence in Chalco has destroyed your politeness. Explain yourself!"

"I know you to be an honourable man," said the doctor

gravely ; "therefore let me beseech you not to be a foolish one, by falling in love with this girl, whose nationality, education, and civilization can never make her a fit life-companion for you, or indeed for any Englishman."

"You are jumping to a most ridiculous conclusion," I answered. "Surely it is possible for a man to be attracted by a pretty girl without rushing into matrimony?"

"It is possible, but dangerous," said Gillett warningly. "Take my advice, and cease to form an integral part of her shadow. Why, I was in the gardens yesterday morning, and caught a glimpse of you and Oosita, and for the life of me I could not tell which were your hands and which hers, so intimately were they mixed. Probably had I played the spy longer, I might have been in just the same dilemma in sorting your faces."

"You might have stayed as long as you liked," I replied indignantly. "We should not have placed you in the dilemma you so broadly hint at."

"I am glad to hear it. I suppose I may take that admission for an assurance that you are not in love?"

"Of course," I answered dubiously. "And I quite agree with you that it would never do for me to marry any one but an English girl."

"All's well that ends well," quoted the doctor. "You have relieved my mind considerably, for I began to fear that your persistent avoidance of my society, coupled with your close attendance on Oosita, betokened breakers ahead."

The conversation was terminated by a summons to dinner, and, to our great delight, we found the lord of the Diamond Cross had returned, after completing his month's duty on the frontier. The soldiers of the royal tribe had relieved his men, the Tlilcoatl*i* did duty at the palace, whilst Amu now had charge of the city gates.

When the meal was over, Amu withdrew with me into a recess and poured forth his gratitude for my having saved his daughter from the embrace of the deadly Anaconda.

He persisted in hearing all the details from my own lips ; and when I had concluded, his handsome face became overclouded with anxiety, and he remained in thoughtful silence for some moments.

"Tell me," he said at last, "is it permitted to your priests in England to have visions ? Those of Ra-teotl and of Tlilcoatl profess to foretell coming events, but to the ministers of Xexuteotl no such power is vouchsafed."

"The priests of all religions have invariably claimed the prophetic gift," I answered. "But I do not think it either exists or is required in the Christian Church. All that is necessary in our worship has already been revealed to us."

"Can you state with certainty that it is dead ?" asked Amu.

"I cannot," was my reply.

"Then you cannot destroy the incubus which weighs heavily on my heart," said Amu mournfully. "This accident to my daughter has brought to recollection an old prophecy which a soothsayer of Ra-teotl uttered concerning my tribe. About a hundred years after the death of Deesmunx, when his descendants were beginning to multiply, the priestess fell into a trance and was seized with strong convulsions in sight of all the people. Whilst they were wondering what calamity this might portend, she suddenly became calm, and gave utterance to this oracle—

"'The Deesmunxiatli shall wax strong and be held in honour by all men, because they have sought out the hidden wisdom of Ra, and have not striven to be mighty by force or fraud. Yet there cometh a cloud out of the east, from beneath the kingdom of Ra, which will wrap them in its dark veil swiftly and suddenly. The mystery is hidden in the bosom of the Lord of all Light, yet he grants me the vision of a white man stepping from the cloud, and clinging to the tribe until it vanishes. The cloud becomes spiral, and its coils wreath themselves like unto Apap, the accursed serpent. Beware, O lord of the Diamond Cross ! When

the Serpent shall embrace thy daughter, thy place shall know thee no more.'"

"What gloomy inference can you draw from these ravings of a heathen priestess?" I asked.

"Is it not plain to you?" said Amu. "You are the white man from the east who has shown his love for the Deesmunxiatli by saving their chief's daughter from the embrace of the Serpent. Is not the occurrence identical with that foreseen by the seer?"

"There is another way of looking at it," I replied. "Assuming that there is any truth in the prophecy, might not the priestess have been merely uttering a warning against the intermarriage of your tribe with the Serpent-worshippers? If such an unnatural union had been permitted, any ordinary man could have prophesied a gradual deterioration of morals, which would ultimately reduce your followers to a state of degradation, ending probably in their extinction. But as these intermarriages have not taken place, nor are ever likely to, I simply regard this oracle as the babbling nonsense of a garrulous old woman."

"Your words are kind and sensible, but they fail to relieve me from a sense of coming woe," said Amu dejectedly. Then with wonderful self-command he threw off his despondency, held his head erect, and looked at me once more with determination sparkling in his handsome eyes.

"If peril should ever threaten me or mine, would you and your brother stand by my side and aid me with your magic thunder and lightning?"

"Till death!" I answered warmly. "We English never forget hospitality so lavishly given, or friendship so unreservedly offered. Hence, should occasion arise, we will valiantly battle by thy side against thy enemies."

Amu appeared deeply touched by my words. He placed his hand on my forehead and then went hastily away, as if fearful of betraying any emotion in my presence. He

managed to communicate some of his gloomy forebodings to me, although I felt the utmost contempt for the priestess' prophecy. Perhaps my mental depression was due to the deep sympathy I had for him ; and it was this, I suppose, which deprived me of my usual light-heartedness for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECORDS OF THE PAST.

I HAD taken up my position with Oosita in the arbour, a few mornings after Amu's return, and was feasting my eyes on her loveliness as well as filling my mind with her sweetly quaint sayings, when the sound of footsteps crunching the fine quartz which did duty for gravel, and a series of warning coughs, informed me that the doctor was coming to break in on our *tête-à-tête*. A malediction on all interlopers passed my lips, and a black cloud settled on my face as Gillett's broad, good-humoured features became visible through the leafy screen.

"Good news, Wrenforth," he exclaimed. "Sethi, the high priest, accompanied by his *posse comitatus*, has just arrived to carry us off to a private view of his temple."

"We cannot possibly go in the broad daylight," I objected. "It is death to enter the grand square, and I therefore prefer the safer position I now occupy. In plain language, I decline to commit such an act of egregious folly for the sake of deciphering a few hieroglyphs."

"But we shall be well disguised in the flowing robes of the priesthood," answered Gillett. "And our friend has purposely chosen this hour, when the people are resting indoors from the heat of the sun, to avoid any risk of our being recognized."

"It does not very much lessen the danger," I replied.

"If Ambouli's spies are watching us, we are certain to be detected."

"I begin to think you are in love," whispered Gillett contemptuously. "Nothing else can account for your sudden timidity—you who have never before hesitated to accompany me in anything which promised a little excitement or peril! I must therefore go alone."

The doctor's words roused me. I began to think that my conduct could rightly be called churlish if I allowed him to run any risk without my being at hand to support him. It certainly seemed hard to have to tear myself away from Oosita, but friendship imposes duties which cannot be evaded, even for the sake of sweet dalliance with a very pretty girl. My better feelings thus induced me to withdraw the refusal, and consent to be turned into a priest of Ra-teotl for the nonce.

A hearty laugh at Gillett's grotesque figure, habited in a long white robe sweeping the ground, and his head helmeted in a tall conical cap, completely dispersed my ill-humour. When I had got into the same ugly disguise, his merriment broke forth at my expense, and we were both so convulsed at our ridiculous appearance that we had much difficulty in composing our features into the gravity requisite for meeting so important a personage as the *Semer*, or high priest, of Ra-teotl.

We got over our greetings without exciting the ire of the priests, and then placing ourselves in the centre of the group for better concealment, marched off to the forbidden precincts of the grand square.

As we entered it, the enormous pyramidal pile rising to a stupendous height, and seeming to occupy the entire northern end, immediately attracted our observation and excited our awe and wonder at seeing here a grand though smaller facsimile of the gigantic tombs of the Pharaohs scattered throughout Egypt. When about fifty paces off, the priests commenced a slow, monotonous chant, and

continued it as the golden gates flew open, and gave us admission to a broad avenue paved with mosaic, and lined with those curious, mystic animals, the crio-sphinxes.¹

I was more than astonished at witnessing these essentially Egyptian sculptures — sculptures which represent with faithful exactitude the body of an animal totally unknown on the American continent. Thus, on the very threshold of the temple, we saw enough to convince us that our surmises as to the origin of this people were correct, and that we were now passing from the semi-barbarism of the Aztec to the pure and elegant refinement of the old dwellers by the Nile. We advanced up the avenue, amidst the chorus of the priests, to the great doorway of the Pyramid, guarded on either side by a colossal figure of Osiris, at least thirty feet high. Over the door was a hieroglyphic inscription to this effect—

“O ye who live upon the earth, men, priests, scribes, bards—you who love life and hate death—who give praise to the gods of your country, but who have not yet tasted the food of the other world, may you transmit your virtues to your children.”

Sethi translated the inscription for us whilst we entered the sacred precincts of the temple and found ourselves in a large, lofty hall supported by a row of pillars on each side, and by a double row of loftier ones down the centre. We did not linger here longer than to take our leave of the inferior priests, then Gillett and I, conducted by Sethi, ascended a flight of thirty-three steps, which brought us to a hall of enormous dimensions, whose walls, ceiling, and pillars were crowded with the hieratic writing so familiar to us in Egypt.

“This is the Annal Chamber of Olmi,” exclaimed the high priest. “All around you is inscribed the history of my people from the day they founded the city of Chalco until the present.”

¹ Sphinxes formed of the body of a lion and the head of a ram.

"Oh!" ejaculated Gillett with an air of disappointment. "All this is modern history in which I am not so much interested as in reading those ancient records which tell of the doings of the Olmec race long before they were forced to migrate from the Mexican valley."

"I can gratify your wish," said Sethi. "The Semer, in the time of the migration, brought away with him many ancient documents, as well as copies of the inscriptions on the walls of our original temple. Thus the records of the nation are complete from the date of its inception until now. Come with me to the Papyrus Chamber, and you shall feast your eyes on the precious relics of long bygone ages."

We hastened after our guide down a descending passage, until we reached the doorway of another room. He pointed significantly to the superscription and translated it.

"This is the divine lesson taught by the history of nations to all men. It is this—'He prospers who, in all his actions, is guided by goodness.'

"A moral maxim good for the statesman as well as the individual," said Gillett, as he eagerly pushed into the muniment room and gazed around excitedly upon the enormous piles of papyri which everywhere met his eyes. Yet all were arranged with perfect neatness and method, and a very few explanatory words from the priest gave us the clue how to proceed with our research.

The very first document the doctor took up and spread out before him proved of great importance, for it purported to be an exact copy of the one deposited in the temple at Necheb, and was brought to the New World by Olmethi, a prince and governor of the colony. Sethi claimed an antiquity of twelve thousand years for this papyrus, a length of time which made even Gillett look incredulous and remark that as it was not written in the Demotic character he was willing to believe it was in existence

before the time of Caracalla.¹ As Sethi had never heard of the Roman Emperor, he was unaware that the doctor had practically expressed his disbelief in such a preposterous assertion ; he therefore continued blandly to discourse of events which happened in Egypt, even before this papyrus was written, as if they had occurred only yesterday.

I was astonished that the original discoverer of America did not give his name to the new land, but surrendered the honour to Olmethi, the Egyptian prince who first led a band of colonists to cultivate its fertile soil. Thus the country became known as Olmi, and its inhabitants assumed the distinctive title of Olmecs, while the name of Balaspis, the great Columbus of remote antiquity, occurs nowhere out of the papyrus I am about to transcribe for the benefit of the reader. How it happened that this man did not receive the justice due to him for apprizing the king of his discovery of new lands inhabited by strange races, I know not, neither could Sethi throw any light upon the mystery. He suggested that when we next visited Egypt, we should crave permission to search the archives of the palace and temples of Necheb, little imagining that they, its people, and its faith had crumbled to dust and ruin countless centuries ago. He could not grasp the fact that he and his handful of co-religionists had stood still, whilst the mother country had gone through a succession of upheavals which had destroyed the worship of Isis, Horus, and Osiris, had changed the original inhabitants, and had evolved a population to whom he would appeal in vain for sympathy. To him Egypt existed still as it was described in these ancient papyri, and we both thought it would be kindness to make no attempt to undeceive him.

The Papyrus of Balaspis relating to the discovery of Olmi.

I, Balaspis, son of Huni, and Lord of the Sails of the

¹ About 214 A.D., the date at which the more cursive writing began to supersede the hieroglyphs.

King's fleet,¹ have commanded Kabuku the scribe to take down my words in order that they may be reported to Athoth, the mighty King, the lord of all lands, at his palace at Necheb.

I came with fifteen war-galleys to the *Nu-t*² of Atlanti when Ra was at his midday splendour. Here I received the tribute and the King's dues, and was preparing to depart when news was brought that two chiefs who had travelled far from the west of the island besought an audience.

This I accordingly granted, and they told me that the power and fame of Athoth had penetrated unto their remote country, and had induced them to come and beg for my assistance against a horde of red barbarians who had invaded their territory and massacred the inhabitants. Ever anxious to make the glory of Athoth known in all lands, I sailed to the west, destroyed the boats of the red invaders, and aided my allies to slay their enemies. Ten of these fierce savages have I reserved as slaves for the King.

Thence I sailed to discover the land of the strange red man, and found it to be very beautiful, with a vegetation different from that of Chemi, or even from that of the colonies of Atlanti. Here I caused a pillar to be erected and the divine image of Athoth to be engraved thereon.

"Sethi is right about the antiquity of this papyrus," I exclaimed, as soon as the doctor had finished reading it to me. "The remarkable mention of the island of Atlantis—an island now considered as mythical as El Dorado—has given me a clue to arriving at a date not far differing from that of the priest. I remember that Plato tells us in the *Timæus* that he received a description of the place from some high members of the Egyptian priesthood, and that it had been submerged beneath the sea nine thousand years

¹ A title corresponding to that of Lord High Admiral.

² Chief town.

before his time. The Greek philosopher visited the land of the Nile about 400 b.c., that is, 2,300 years ago ; therefore I come to the conclusion that Atlantis was still flourishing about 11,300 years from our own epoch."

"I don't think we have any valid reason for declining to believe in Atlantis," said the doctor thoughtfully. "Anyhow, this papyrus is enough to make us change our minds, even if we were previously sceptical. Its eastern end was evidently known and tributary to the ancient kingdom of Egypt ; moreover, its position, stretching from the African shore to the eastern side of America, renders it extremely probable that an adventurous naval power like that of Egypt would not be long in discovering and colonizing so luxuriant and fertile a region as that of the new continent."

"But is it not surpassing strange that a huge island, as Atlantis must have been, should have become so completely blotted out, whilst the contiguous continents have maintained their stability and configuration in defiance of all the hostile attacks of the elements ?" I asked.

"You cannot prove your assertion," answered Gillett. "For all you know to the contrary, the coast lines of Africa and America may have become enormously altered during the 12,000 years in dispute. No doubt Atlantis was destroyed by some terrific convulsion of nature, such as would be produced by volcanoes and earthquakes. Now I believe that Africa has no record of any active volcano, but if I turn to the group of islands called the Azores and Canaries, which must have formed the eastern shores of our hypothetical island, I find most distinct evidence of recent subterranean action.¹ Then, following the supposed land to the westward, I find that its American end included in its boundaries Cuba, the Bahamas, and several other of the West Indian isles, all noted for the violence of the earthquakes which occur there. This seems to give some

¹ In 1811 a new volcano rose from beneath the sea off St. Michael, one of the Azores.

support to the theory that Atlantis once existed, but was annihilated by volcanic agency, and that the little pieces of land I have mentioned are the sole remaining vestiges of that once magnificent region ‘adorned with woods and bowers and sunlit pastures, with sparkling fountains and crystal rivers.’”

“I call to mind another fact which may serve to clinch your argument,” I replied, carried away by the doctor’s eloquence. “The Guanches, or original inhabitants of the Canaries, a race now almost extinct, possess many of the characteristics and customs of the ancient Egyptians, notably that of embalming the dead. I infer, therefore, that these Guanches are the direct descendants of the Egyptian colonists of Atlantis.”

“It is all inference at present,” answered Gillett. “But it is backed up by such ancient testimony,” continued he, excitedly tapping the papyrus of Balaspis, “that I am now prepared to swear to an implicit belief in its having once existed.”

We turned again to the inspection of the documents, and found that Athoth had evidently been impressed by his admiral’s report, and still more so by the present of the ten red men. A copy of a royal rescript informed us that the King had commanded a large naval expedition to sail with all speed to the new land and take possession of it. This was accordingly done, and such glowing accounts of the climate and fertile soil began to circulate amongst the peasantry of Upper Egypt, that Olmethi, a wealthy prince, petitioned the King to allow him to plant a colony of his dependants in the new continent. Having received permission as well as authority to act as governor, he departed in ships provided by the King, with a following of eleven hundred men, women, and children, and arrived safely at his destination. The admiral (probably the ill-treated Balaspis) had already established a military station on the mainland, and consequently felt himself aggrieved

at being superseded by another man. He therefore refused to obey the King's mandate, and treated his signet with contempt. But Olmethi had formed a strong party amongst the sailors of Balaspis' fleet by promising them grants of land and perfect freedom in their new quarters, and by their aid he was enabled to seize the luckless admiral and send him back in chains to Necheb to be judged by his King. The fate of this unfortunate man is not mentioned in the records at Chalco, though his sentence may yet be extant in one or other of the palaces of Egypt.

Placed thus in supreme power, Olmethi built a city on the sea-coast, near the spot where he first landed—probably on the most northerly point of Yucatan—and then despatched valuable presents to the King with a petition that he would send a high priest to conduct the mysteries of Isis, Horus, and Osiris. In course of a few months, Antef, the progenitor of our friend Sethi, was inducted into the temple prepared for him, and, from that time to the present, his lineal descendant has kept alive amongst the Olmecs the traditions of the ancient land of Chemi.

Olmethi governed his colony for forty years, and during his lifetime considerably enlarged its borders to the west. He promulgated a law making it death for a pure Egyptian to intermarry with a woman of the native race, and to obviate any difficulty in procuring wives, encouraged and promoted a large stream of emigration from the parent country.

From Yucatan they gradually spread their dominion in every direction, and finally overran and civilized the country now known as Mexico. Before long the Mexican city became the capital of the state; and here, as elsewhere, they perpetuated the architecture, religion, manners, and customs of Egypt, this being especially noticeable in their pyramids, which to this day the Atlicaligui call "Pehram," an old hierarchical word signifying a sacred place.

Five hundred years after its foundation, the colony had become so rich and powerful that it refused to send tribute or pay taxes to the home government. This resulted in a war with the parent country, in which the colonists came off victorious. From time to time during the next hundred years, several expeditions were sent to reduce the rebellious Olmecs to subjection, but they all ended disastrously for the mother country, who finally gave up the task in despair, and consoled herself by boycotting her mutinous children. From this date intercourse between Egypt and Olmi seems to have ceased, for we searched in vain for any further papyri containing any mention of Chemi.

We now hurriedly inspected documents of great interest, but as our grand old antiquarian Sethi had promised us the history of the destruction of Atlantis, we were too eager to come to these particular papyri to bestow much thought upon the internal development of the Olmec kingdom. We came across name after name of the potentates of Olmi, who, adopting the royal nomenclature of the mother country, styled themselves Pharaohs. We hastily glanced through details of important conquests, of embassies received from distant parts, of the discovery of copper ore, and of various social and economic reforms, until we alighted upon a papyrus written by Atun, the servant of Ra, containing a description of the terrific convulsion of nature whereby Atlantis, with its teeming population, was wiped off from the face of the earth. I must mention that the Olmec priesthood divided time into cycles of fifty-two years, commencing from the date of the foundation of the colony, and as the first document relating to the destruction of Atlantis occurred at the very commencement of the twenty-first cycle, I was enabled to fix the date of the catastrophe at 1092 of their era.

"Ra has hidden his face, Osiris reigns supreme,"¹ began

¹ The various phases of the sun, from its rising to its setting, were looked upon by the Egyptians as so many different forms of the Deity.

the lament of Atun. “ Darkness covers the surface of the earth, and a solemn stillness pervades the air, filling all men with terror and consternation, and overwhelming them with apprehensions of coming destruction. I, Atun, Semer of Ra, know the meaning of sinking waters ; I know how to produce the form for issuing forth and coming in ; I know the making of amulets, by which we may go so that the fire shall not burn nor the water drown. Yet I, whom Ra has made excellent in his art, know not the meaning of earth’s dismal obscurity, nor of the flashes of light in the superior regions. Ra has hidden this thing from me so that men may be distracted with confusion and fear.”

This awful stillness of the elements and occultation of the sun lasted apparently for ten days, when, with an appalling suddenness, Nature awoke from her unnatural sleep with a wild, tumultuous uproar, driving men and animals frantic with terror. The glass-like surface of the sea was upheaved into vast mountains of white, roaring foam ; the wind raged with the force of a terrific hurricane ; rain descended in a perfect deluge ; the earth trembled and shook with the violent oscillations of earthquakes, and the whole atmosphere was ablaze with the frequent, quick flashes of lightning, and reverberated continuously with the sharp crackle of thunder. A curious fact concerning animals is recorded by Atun in this series of papyri. It is to the effect that they suffered such terror during this convulsion of nature that the most savage, as well as the most timid, herded together for safety, and even flocked into the towns for the companionship of man. The gentle priest was so touched by this display of faith that he persuaded the King to issue an edict making it penal for any man to kill an animal who had sought his protection. All honour to Atun, the good and merciful !

Thus, whilst rising it was called *Choper* ; at mid-day, *Ra*, *Chu*, or *Hor* ; whilst setting, *Nofer-tum* ; at night, *Osiris*.

All this wild, tumultuous action of Nature was only the prelude to the vast work of destruction she had taken in hand, for, on the far horizon, the Olmecs beheld lurid sheets of flame bursting upwards to prodigious heights, accompanied by showers of ashes, which were wafted towards them and deposited in thick layers on the ripening crops of Yucatan. The reason for all these preternatural phenomena was now clear ; the Olmecs saw the island of Atlantis in the awful throes of volcanic convulsion, and Atun wrote a prayer to Osiris thanking him for his mercy in sparing his people.

During the ten succeeding cycles, corresponding to a period of 520 years, the documents continually refer to the condition of Atlantis, which, after the first eruption, became gradually resolved into twelve volcanic mountains ceaselessly pouring out smoke and flame. At the middle of the thirty-second cycle, after a terrific outburst, the volcanoes sank beneath the ocean, and have remained quiescent ever since.

Thus 1638 years after the settlement of the Egyptians in America, or according to our computation 8462 b.c., the last relics of a once lovely paradise disappeared, and its very existence has been treated by succeeding generations of men as mythical. The world is indebted in more ways than one to the hierarchy of the Nile ; the accurate and painstaking way in which they kept the records of nations, and inscribed them on imperishable materials, has been the means of placing many a fact, hitherto regarded as fabulous, upon a true historical basis. Thanks to these learned hierophants, Gillett and I could now solve the vexed question of the origin of the Olmec nation, and explain, through the intervention of Atlantis, how the Egyptians had contrived to travel so far from their own coasts in their frail and shallow ships.

The subsequent history of this interesting nation can be briefly told. In the year 9500 (600 b.c.) its independence

ceased with the irruption of the warlike Toltec tribe. Their new masters treated them leniently, respected their religion, and eagerly copied their civilization. At this period the Olmec marriage laws became relaxed, with the result that the pure blood of the Egyptian became mingled with that of the Toltecs, giving rise to a race of half-breeds known as Atlicaligui, which name subsequently became that of the whole nation. A small remnant of Olmecs refused to intermarry with alien races, and these pure Egyptians constituted the royal tribe of Ra-teotl.

I had thought it little short of marvellous that a race should retain its individuality in so decided a form after the lapse of nearly 12,000 years, but their strictness in marrying amongst themselves explained it. The worshippers of Ra-teotl were identical in type with their forefathers, who adored Amun-Ra in Memphis or Thebes. They had the same square, rather low forehead, thickish lips, large eyes, small rounded nose, and soft expression of features, slightly tinged with gravity. They possessed the same tall stature, broad shoulders, and long delicately-formed hand. In every detail we were forced to the conclusion that the royal tribe of the Atlicaligui exhibited the essential characteristics of the mighty race of Cham. The only thing that had undergone any perceptible alteration was the language, and this had been effected naturally by incorporating many words derived from races whom they had conquered, or by whom they were vanquished. Had I nothing else upon which to form my theory, I should esteem it sufficient proof of the Egyptian origin of this people by constantly coming across words which belong to the language of the hieroglyph and none other. For example, the marshes which surrounded Chalco were called *Pehu*, cultivated land was denominated *Nu*, the chief of a tribe *Hiq*—words belonging exclusively to the ancient Egyptian.

In the year of their chronology 10,950 (850 A.D.), the

country was invaded and conquered by savage hordes from the north, who inaugurated such a horrible system of massacre and persecution that the Olmecs, forming the royal tribe, determined to leave their native land. They succeeded in escaping across the isthmus of Panama, and, after many wanderings, reached the quartz hills, where they founded a new city. Accurate records of the road were made, in order that people of Egyptian blood might easily rejoin their brethren at Chalco. Every priest in Mexico was in possession of a hieroglyphic map of the country to be traversed, and from him any man who could prove his consanguinity received full information of the route.

Although the royal tribe thus deserted the country, yet a large remnant still remained behind, and, like the Jews, maintained for another 250 years their marvellous individuality. Then came the crowning disaster. In 11,264 (1164 A.D.) the Aztecs sallied forth from Aztlan, crossed the rivers Colorado and Gila, into Mexico, which they reduced to subjection. The ferocity of these new conquerors gradually drove the rest of the Atlicaligui to join their countrymen at the safe haven of Chalco. So well and faithfully was the secret of the road of the Hieroglyph kept, that with the final exodus all knowledge of the continued existence of the Olmec and Toltec races completely died out.

Thus it came to pass that a nation, far advanced in civilization and refinement, stole silently from the country it had so long adorned, and passed utterly away from the gaze of the world; and had it not been for our strange discovery of Desmonde's journal, the mystery which surrounded them would in all probability have remained for ever unlifted.

Standing as we were in a temple dedicated to an august and venerable superstition—a superstition which in the earlier days of humanity exercised a preponderating in-

fluence on its destinies—we could not withhold our admiration for a priesthood which had for countless centuries occupied itself with the task of preserving a nation's annals. This hierarchy cared more for the people than did that of any other heathen cult, and in its toleration for all forms of religion presented yet another trait peculiarly Egyptian. The worship of Ra-teotl was a pure monotheism, and was unaccompanied by those disgraceful orgies and cruel sacrifices which so frequently polluted the altars of other nations. This can be accounted for by the naturally humane character of the sons of Cham; their punishments were not cruel, and they never tortured their prisoners of war. The human sacrifices which disfigured the Serpent worship were an abomination to the royal tribe, as well as to the Deesmunxiatli, and I often heard men bitterly deplore the short-sightedness of their ancestors in permitting the Tlilcoatli—an almost alien race—to join their confederacy. The only bond that held them together in so unnatural an alliance was a most unreasonable fear of the white man.

It was a matter of extreme regret to us that a nation so self-reliant and refined, so enlightened and adorned with all the virtues, and free from most of the vices of their European brethren, should be forced to hide its light and calmly pass down the stream of ages without being able to throw the blessings of its civilization over the surrounding barbarous tribes.

CHAPTER XV.

KINSMEN OR STRANGERS?

WHILST we were occupied in deciphering the ancient papyri at the temple, a royal summons was delivered to Amu, commanding him to produce his two strange visitors and their followers at the King's palace the next morning.

Our host had determined to conduct us into the presence with as much pomp and circumstance as if we were princely personages, to whom he desired to pay homage. He decided on this course in the hope of impressing the King and his councillors with his own belief in our close relationship to the founder of his tribe. On the eventful day, therefore, we found ourselves surrounded by a glittering array of magnificently-attired men, who escorted us to the grand square with clash of cymbals and flourish of trumpets. The Deesmunxiatli, who crowded every street, made low obeisance as we passed, and vociferously shouted, "Reverence to the noble brothers of great Deesmunk!" It was not the march of prisoners going to their doom, but the triumphant progress of conquerors through the streets of the capital. This enthusiasm did much for us in the way of raising our drooping spirits. They required some little stimulus, for they were depressed by the ominous fact that our trial had been shelved whilst Amu's soldiers were on duty at the palace, and had been pushed forward directly Ambouli's men relieved them. Whether this was a mere

coincidence or was dictated by the Serpent-worshipper's craft, we never knew.

The King's palace was situated on the southern aspect of the square, in the midst of most tastefully laid out gardens, enclosed on all sides by large, cylindrical columns, connected by a massive lattice-work of gold. The building itself was unique in being the only one in Chalco devoid of the all-pervading dome. It resembled in every respect an ancient Egyptian structure, and recalled to my mind the magnificent temple I had seen at Edfu on the Nile. The entrance to the grounds was through a *propylaeum* or colossal doorway placed between two enormous pyramidal towers, which served as the barracks for the royal guard.

Crowds of gaily-dressed warriors and courtiers, resplendent with gold, jewels, and feather-work cloaks, thronged the avenue up which our procession passed, and seemed, by the benignant smiles with which they greeted us, to be wishing us a happy issue out of the ordeal we were soon to undergo.

As we mounted the broad flight of marble steps and entered the Hall of Audience, Amu looked restlessly round and gave vent to an angry exclamation.

"What has upset your gravity?" I inquired.

"The King's body-guard is not on duty," replied Amu, grinding his teeth with vexation.

"Is that all?" I replied listlessly. "I do not suppose the fact will sway the royal judgment?"

"Can you not see what it means?" said Amu savagely.

It means that Ambouli has persuaded Cephren to dispense with his own guard within the palace, and to permit the Tlilcoatli to act as substitutes. It is a sinister omen, and probably conceals a plot to seize the prisoners if the King decides in their favour."

Down went my spirits to zero as the lord of the Diamond Cross gave utterance to his suspicions. Hitherto I had comforted myself with the belief that our assumed relation-

ship to Amu would be the means of effectually protecting us; but with the evidence of Ambouli's craft and malignity before me, I could not but feel that our position was terribly insecure. The Tlilcoatl, being on duty, were armed, whereas court etiquette forbade all others from carrying weapons within the precincts of the palace. Thus we had none to rely upon except ourselves in case of an adverse judgment, or of an attempt to effect our capture. We mustered, however, twenty-two six-chambered revolvers carefully concealed beneath our coats, and this would allow us a hundred and thirty-two shots before we succumbed to numerical superiority. Altogether, considering we had a well-drilled band of Indians, if the worst came to the worst, we might succeed in fighting our way to Amu's mansion, and, with the assistance of his warriors, turn our backs in safety upon Chalco. But, for the present, there was nothing else to be done except to meet cunning with cunning, and, by force of our superior wisdom, circumvent the wiles of our inveterate enemy.

Whilst thus preoccupied with these unpleasant thoughts, a flourish of trumpets resounded through the hall, and the doors of the throne-room were immediately opened. We passed in, accompanied by Amu, who pointed significantly to the crowd of armed men of the Tlilcoatl tribe, conspicuous amongst whom was the arch-fiend Ambouli. Stretched across the upper end of this sumptuously decorated apartment were heavy curtains of purple Llanchama, ornamented with hieroglyphic devices in gold, jewels, and feather-work. I was lost in amazement at the wonderful skill exhibited by the constructors of these artistic draperies. The marvellously delicate taste they displayed, the harmonious combination of colours, and the spirited execution of the designs, left nothing to suggest by way of adding to their beauty. Surely such evidence of artistic culture ought to be a proof of the nation's justice and humanity. A barbarous law which rigidly demanded the execution of

strangers must be a dead letter amongst so highly-refined a people, and our trial would therefore be nothing more than a mere formality.

My wandering thoughts were abruptly recalled by a second flourish of trumpets. The purple curtains were slowly withdrawn, and revealed the figure of Cephren, seated on a throne of ivory, surrounded by his councillors. This ivory chair was the most antique object in the possession of the Aticaligui, and, if tradition could be believed, was brought from Egypt by the first colonists of Olmi. I regarded it with great curiosity, for its elaborate ornamentation had been carved in Africa more than twelve thousand years ago, and yet looked as fresh as if it had only been done yesterday. It was another link in the great chain of facts which connected America with the Nile.

As the King's presence became visible, the great crowd of courtiers below the dais performed the customary salutation, which consisted in touching the ground with one hand and then conveying it to the forehead. According to previous instructions from Amu, we did not make our obeisance at the same time as the others, but stood erect whilst they were stooping and recovering themselves. Then seeing Cephren's eyes fixed upon us, we advanced a few paces and made our *salaams*. We had been told that if the monarch was inclined to regard us favourably, he would acknowledge our salute by pointing two fingers of his left hand towards us. We waited anxiously for the sign, but, alas, it was not vouchsafed ; and its non-appearance brought a gleam of triumph into Ambouli's dark eyes.

Meanwhile, the King looked at us at first curiously, then with an expression of melancholy, as if he were really sorry for our predicament, out of which he had no power to help us. He was a tall, handsome man, with grave, pleasing features, so exactly conforming to the true Egyptian type that I had some difficulty in persuading myself I was

not standing before the judgment-seat of a Sesostris or Rameses !

For a few minutes an intense silence reigned throughout the hall, which presented the most picturesque scene it has ever been my lot to witness. The grave monarch seated on his ivory throne, glittering with all the colours of the rainbow, and encircled by his councillors resplendent with feather-work and sparkling with jewels ; the Tlilcoatl warriors clad in purple, with golden helmet and breastplate, each holding erect the long copper-tipped lance ; the scarlet of the Deesmunxiatli, with the diamond crosses flashing in the bright rays of the sun ; the white-robed priests of Ra-teotl, whose simplicity of attire formed an admirable contrast to the surrounding flash of gem and glitter of gold ; the stolid faces of our little band of Indians painted with seven transverse bars of vermillion—each and all contributed to make up the most extraordinary collection of grouping and colouring I shall ever see, for, out of Chalco, such an assemblage would be an impossibility. The silence was at last broken by the King.

“ My lord Ambouli has informed me that during his term of duty as Captain of the Gates, the lord of the Diamond Cross did introduce two white men and their followers within the city, and refused to surrender them in accordance with the law of the Atlicaligui.”

“ Reverence to Cephren, the Beloved of Ra-teotl,” exclaimed Ambouli, stepping forward. “ By virtue of the law ordained for the safety of the nation, I require that these men be handed to the priests of Tlilcoatl for sacrifice.”

“ Reverence to Cephren, the Beloved of Ra-teotl,” said Amu, advancing to the opposite side of the throne. “ The lord Ambouli requires too much, for how can these men be strangers and foreigners when they are connected to my tribe by the closest ties of blood ? ”

“ Whence come they, and why have they penetrated to this city ? ” asked the King.

"They come from the birthplace of Deesmunx in the far-off East, from the land of the rising sun," replied Amu. "They are his brothers who have grown weary with waiting for his return, and have therefore come to seek him."

"Is this so?" demanded Cephren, turning to us. "Or have you come as spies from the white man to estimate our wealth? We know full well the greed and treachery which fill the hearts of your countrymen; we have heard of their thirst for gold and precious stones, and of the cruel methods whereby they attempt to obtain them. Now answer me, and see that you speak the truth, for I will carefully weigh your words and sift the true from the false; and if the false predominate, they will convict you."

The King evidently had the same mistrust in the faith of a European as his people. It was not flattering to hear so many opprobrious epithets hurled at one's own race, and I more than once felt inclined to interrupt the royal speech with some forcible language. But as discretion is credited with being the better part of valour, I controlled my impetuosity, and vowed that he should be regaled with the most Munchausen-like fibs I could manufacture on the spur of the moment. I held a whispered consultation with Gillett, and suggested that we could romance *ad libitum* without the least fear of contradiction, as the King's knowledge of the white man must be infinitesimal. He assented to this, but begged that I would allow him to conduct the defence, as he feared my sense of the ridiculous might be productive of some disastrous *contretemps*. Having received my assurance that I would only speak when spoken to, he commenced his address.

"Reverence to Cephren, the Beloved of Ra-teotl! The statement of the lord of the Diamond Cross is truth, and therefore we claim the hospitality of your mighty and wonderful nation in the name of kinship and brotherhood. We have a proverb in the far-off land of our birth which runs thus—'There is no benefit in a son who is neither

learned nor truthful, neither is there any use in a sightless eye; such an eye is but pain.' Ponder this saying in your mind, O Beloved of Ra-teotl, and it will show you that a people who thus worship wisdom and truth cannot be so black-hearted as you deem them. My countrymen, the friends and relations of the great Deesmunx, attach so great a value to veracity that they regard its absence to be as painful and pernicious as blindness. Were these virtues found to be wanting in the progenitor of the Deesmunxiatl? No, for to this day he is reverenced amongst you as a good and noble man. Yet he was a pale-face and our brother."

Gillett's words were received with a slight murmur of approbation, under cover of which I asked him for the source of his grandiloquent proverb.

"I am ashamed to say that I started my oration with a deliberate falsehood," he whispered. "The proverb is not derived from the wisdom of the white man, but is extracted from the Sanscrit *Hitopadesa*, and slightly altered to meet the requirements of our case."

"Go on as you have begun," I replied, "and you will establish the finest reputation for veracity in Chalco."

"You have well spoken," said Cephren, as a gentle smile relaxed the grave expression of his features. "Perhaps the race of Deesmunx is different to that of the pale-faces we hear such evil reports about?"

"Entirely different," answered Gillett unblushingly. "Our race is truth-loving, and respects the rights and properties of others, as well as their slightest wishes. Thus, hearing of the desire of your people to keep themselves secluded from the world, the secret of your existence will be locked in our hearts, and neither by word nor sign shall we cause your privacy to be invaded."

"Are you the veritable brothers of Deesmunx who died in this city more than two hundred suns ago?" asked Cephren with an air of perplexity.

"We are," responded the doctor promptly.

"Men must live to a great age in your country," said the King.

"That is true, O Beloved of Ra-teotl."

"How old are you?" asked the puzzled Cephren.

This was a poser! I saw Gillett make a rapid calculation on his fingers; then he spoke with his usual effrontery.

"Two hundred and forty years next birthday, O Beloved of Ra-teotl."

This was too much for anybody's gravity, and I never was nearer exploding with laughter in all my life. But the doctor evidently anticipated my doing something foolish, for he fixed his eyes upon me with a glare of mingled menace and warning. His look brought me back to common sense, and I felt thankful I had restrained my mirth, for to laugh at this juncture might be the signal for our death-warrant.

"Do all men live so long in your England?" inquired Cephren, with a glance which meant that he was not quite prepared to swallow everything set before him.

But Gillett had worked himself up to the highest point of an exaggeration mood, and evidently intended to make the King digest whatever he chose to offer him.

"Men cannot die in England," said the doctor slowly and convincingly. "Its climate is so superb, and its atmosphere so clear and pure, that disease and death are utterly unknown. When life gets monotonous, and existence a fatigue, the wearied one withdraws to a strange land, where he gradually becomes old and dies like other people. It is solely due to this fact that our brother Deesmунx is not alive at the present moment."

"I have heard many wonderful stories of the white men," said the King thoughtfully, "but this is the most marvellous of all! Yet if they can steal thunder and lightning from the heavens and imprison it in their metal tubes to be let loose only for destruction, they must be

capable of doing anything—even of living for ever, like the immortal *Chus* of ancient Chemi."

When the King turned to consult with his Council, I felt that Gillett had gained the day, but my elation was very much damped as I beheld an ominous movement among the Tlilcoatl soldiers. Apparently actuated by some order from Ambouli, a small company descended from the dais into the hall and took up its station within striking distance of our position. To counterbalance this, we imperceptibly edged away from the reach of their long lances, and placed our Indians in a slanting direction so as to cover the enemy with their fire, the moment they declared hostilities.

Cephren's conference had come to an end. Silence was proclaimed, and he delivered judgment.

"Rulers must ever be governed by justice, a virtue which raises them to the gods. Acting upon this principle, I have examined these men and have found no guile in them. They have been guided into this country by a sentiment of brotherly affection which deserves praise rather than punishment. They have undergone many perils and hardships in their quest after their missing relative, and though they have not been fortunate enough to find him, yet they have met his numerous descendants, and have lived with them in peace and amity. I therefore decree that they shall not be considered as strangers and foreigners, but shall be esteemed members of the Deesmuniatl tribe. Their close relationship to its valiant chief I acknowledge by creating them nobles of the first class. Henceforth, let all men treat them with the courtesy due to their high rank. I have spoken."

A sinister smile curled Ambouli's lips as he listened to our acquittal, and it increased in intensity as he watched our pleasure at having passed through the ordeal so successfully. Although convinced that the scoundrel had some deep plot in the background, neither he nor his men made

any sign that they meditated an onslaught. I saw that Chotil was watching him most intently, and feeling relieved at having so vigilant an ally, I turned to Amu, who was approaching us bearing two superb casques ornamented with the device of the Deesmunxiatl in diamonds and emeralds.

"A present from the King to his new lords," he exclaimed, handing one to each of us.

"The Beloved of Ra-teotl is generous," said Gillett. "But what are the duties appertaining to our elevated station?"

"Your position as nobles of the first class gives you a place at the King's Council," replied Amu. "In future you will assist in all deliberations relating to the affairs of the kingdom. But there is one condition attached to the dignity which may not commend itself to you."

"What is it?" inquired the doctor.

"That no member of this order of nobility can ever leave Atlicaliguian territory without the unanimous consent of the King and his Council."

"I presume we should not have much difficulty in obtaining it," said Gillett.

"Ambouli is a councillor!" replied Amu significantly.

"Then I am going to tell Cephren that I decline the honour he has just conferred upon me," I exclaimed indignantly.

"Do nothing so rash," said Amu, detaining me. "Such an insult would never be forgiven."

The high priest Sethi, who had joined us, also entreated me to be well content with the escape I had had, and not to run the risk of gaining the ill-will of a King at present so well disposed towards us.

"You have yet another and graver trouble to face," the priest continued in a low voice. "Beware of the Serpent. He is wily and longs to fix his teeth in your flesh, but be on your guard and remember that I am your friend."

The kindly priest left me abruptly, and mingled with his disciples at the far end of the hall. He had planted an uneasy sensation in my heart just as it was beginning to grow light again. What did he suspect, and how had he ascertained the depth of Ambouli's rancorous hatred against us? The question was answered for me almost immediately by our arch-enemy himself.

Ambouli, who had quitted the hall shortly after the King's decision, now reappeared followed by two humble members of his tribe. He left these prostrate at the foot of the dais whilst he mounted the steps, and, standing by the side of the throne, commenced a much more serious accusation against us than that of violating Atlicaliguian soil.

"These men have just informed me of an act of sacrilege they have seen committed," he began, pointing to the two grovelling slaves. "Blasphemy has reared its head against the goddess of the Tlilcoatli, and she will not be appeased except by human sacrifice."

"In what does the sacrilege consist?" demanded Cephren.

"The sacred Serpent has been slain," replied Ambouli, his features working with a horrible malice. "And I am told that the lord of the Diamond Cross was cognizant of the deed, and instead of delivering the culprits to justice, had shielded them. From you, my lord," he continued, turning to Amu, "I at least demand respect for the laws. You were aware of this wanton insult to our religion, and yet you harboured the white men who perpetrated the outrage."

"Whom do you accuse of this act?" asked Cephren astonished.

"Your two new lords," said Ambouli savagely. "Here are the witnesses who saw the sacrilege committed. They are men of my tribe who happened to be visiting some of the servants at Amu's palace at the time, and they distinctly saw the Anaconda fall beneath the white man's thunder and lightning."

"The Serpent was about to encircle and crush the Lady Oosita," I here interrupted indignantly. "Is there a man amongst you who can blame me for rescuing a fellow-creature from a horrible death? Is there a father here present who would not thank me again and again for saving his daughter from so miserable a fate?"

"None dare resist the embrace of the sacred Serpent," said Ambouli sententiously. "He whom the goddess encircles is holy."

A shudder of disgust plainly agitated the Deesmunxiatli and the royal tribe as Ambouli gave utterance to sentiments totally opposed to the doctrines of Ra as well as of Christianity. The assembled nobles looked at us with admiration and pity, for they well knew that Cephren would be forced to administer the law, which, as it stood, gave ample protection to all religions against sacrilege.

From the far end of the hall, a voice suddenly broke the silence which ensued after Ambouli's last speech, and, as the words came distinctly, I saw Amu shiver.

"Beware, O lord of the Diamond Cross!" it said. "When the Serpent shall embrace thy daughter, thy place shall know thee no more!"

It was the oracular utterance of the old soothsayer of Isis reiterated by the present high priest of Ra-teotl.

I moved promptly to Amu's side, and laying my hand on his, begged him to pay no heed to the superstitious nonsense he had just heard. But he seemed wrapped in deep thought, and did not appear to heed my words. Then he raised his head erect, and, with swift sudden movement, placed himself in front of the ivory throne.

"O mighty King!" he exclaimed in passionate accents, "by that Ra, the Eternal, the Unchangeable, whom we both worship, I adjure thee to weigh my sentences. We know that this Serpent is an accursed thing which our forefathers typified as Apap, the chief of the Powers of Evil. Shall then men of my own blood, one a worshipper of

Xexuteotl, and the other a reader of the hidden wisdom of Ra concealed in the Hieratic papyri, be offered up as a sacrifice to the accursed Tlilcoatl ? Such immorality cannot be tolerated, as we have tolerated these aliens in consanguinity and worship. Their deeds degrade us and make us ashamed to think of our noble ancestors, who were as humane as they were valorous. Publish then, O Beloved of Ra-teotl, an edict which shall abolish human sacrifice, and render the slaying of all harmful serpents an obligation instead of a crime ! ”

This bombshell of Amu’s took every one aback. It was the first time within living memory, I afterwards heard, that any noble had been so fearless as to attack the religious ordinances of the country. It was indeed a perilous move, for the rancour it would be certain to engender might result in disastrous consequences to the nation, amongst which civil war was most to be dreaded. Whilst sympathy beamed from the face of every unarmed man in the hall, the Tlilcoatl guard gleamed angrily around and brought their lances with a thud to the ground. Ambouli literally foamed with rage, and was about to make a vehement retort, when Cephren stopped him.

“Thou knowest, O lord of the Diamond Cross,” said the King with a gesture which restrained Ambouli, “that I cannot by myself alter the law—and by Lord Wrenforth’s own confession he has laid himself open to its penalties. But if I cannot abrogate it, yet I am loath to put it in action, and should be glad to find some method whereby the outraged dignity of Tlilcoatl shall be appeased without the necessity of shedding blood.”

“The goddess’s wrath can never be assuaged save by human sacrifice,” said Ambouli.

“Need that sacrifice involve the death of the victim ? ” asked Cephren. “Listen to me, lord of the Tlilcoatli, and consider well what I say unto thee. Thou art desirous of offering up Amu’s kinsman on the altar of thy Serpent.

Now I propose another kind of sacrifice which will avert bloodshed and perhaps bring about a friendship between thy tribe and the Deesmunxiatli. It is no secret that thou wouldst woo the daughter of Lord Amu, and it is also well known that thy proposal is unacceptable both to her and her father. But at this grave crisis, it would be wise for the lord of the Diamond Cross to waive his objections and permit this union to take place. Thus, the Lady Oosita, who would have fallen a victim but for her English protector, will still be the real sacrifice to the Serpent, and will be offered up on nothing more deadly than the altar of love."

Though the whole attitude of the King plainly showed that he was using his best endeavours on my behalf, yet, when I fairly understood the meaning of his proposition, I nearly choked with rage. If no other method could be devised for saving me than the sacrifice of a gentle, lovely girl to a bloodthirsty ruffian, I would not be a party to it. The bare idea of Eve in all her sweet purity in the power of a Satanic fiend was so revolting, that I silenced Amu as he was about to speak, and gave vent to my own opinion in language I was too indignant to measure.

"Never will I consent to save my life by surrendering the Lady Oosita to yonder savage lord. Can the dove mate with the serpent, or a Christian with a devil-worshipper? It would be so unholy an alliance that, if it ever took place, I would be the first to accuse the lord of the Diamond Cross with wilfully verifying the Egyptian prophecy, that 'when the Serpent embraces his daughter, his race will become extinct.'"

A melancholy smile lighted up the grave face of Cephren as I spoke. I saw that he and all his polished courtiers compassionated my condition. But he could not over-ride the law, and it was with a visible effort that he proceeded to give his sanction to my condemnation, Amu having

previously signified his emphatic dissent to the proposed means of saving his guest.

"A union which might have cemented the nation in firmer bonds of amity has been refused," said the King. "I have therefore no choice left but to condemn the prisoner, and order him forthwith into the custody of the Tlilcoatli. But as I like not to make a lord and execute him immediately after, I require that he shall not be put to death for another ten days, and that during this time he shall be well and honourably treated. I have spoken."

"The Lord Amu may change his mind in the interval," said Ambouli. "I will willingly exchange my prisoner for the Lady Oosita."

Whilst he was speaking, he slowly and stealthily descended the dais towards me, and his men began to follow his example. Gillett shouted an order to Chotil, and the next instant twenty revolvers were presented at the advancing foe. When Ambouli had planted his feet on the last step that separated the dais from the body of the hall, I pointed my weapon at him and cocked it. The click attracted his attention, and a something ominous in my stern, determined appearance caused him to halt and look at me searchingly.

At this critical moment the friendly priest of Ra-teotl intervened between us and forbade Ambouli to advance.

"Beware, tribe of the Tlilcoatli, beware!" he exclaimed. "The commands of the gods are superior to those of kings and men, and must be obeyed. I have had the vision, and Ra has declared unto me that these strangers are sacred. Touch them not, therefore, or they will destroy thee with fire, for thus said Ra unto me concerning them—

*"They can see Shou, the son of Ra, in his triumph,
As he darts his spear against the Serpent,
being Ra.*

*The goddess Iaf'n rests upon their heads ;
She gives her fire against their enemies*

*To reduce them to non-existence.
They are the bolts of Ra, the Oer-haku''* (Sun-god).¹

A considerable amount of awe descended on the assembled crowd as the priest delivered the oracle with all the solemnity of inspiration, and I determined to improve the occasion by letting the audience see for themselves that I really possessed the fire of Iafn. I therefore informed them that I would manifest the tremendous power I wielded, though in a harmless fashion. Whilst they were looking eagerly on, I discharged one chamber of my revolver through an open window. The flash, smoke, and report thoroughly discomfited them; the lordly Ambouli retired precipitately, whilst the others prostrated themselves before me.

I was master of the situation, for a time at least, and was not slow to take advantage of it. I advanced to the foot of the throne, made a reverent obeisance, and asked Cephren what action he would now take in face of the oracle of his god.

"The commands of Ra are a law unto me," replied the King; "and I dare not slay those whom he has proclaimed sacred."

"Thou shalt publish a royal edict," interposed the priest of Ra-teotl. "In it thou shalt tell thy people that the lives of these men and of their followers, together with all their goods and chattels, are inviolable."

"It shall be done, as I reverence the holy name of Ra," answered the King submissively.

"Then we are free to depart?" I asked, hardly believing that the situation could have been so completely changed in so short a time.

"You are at liberty to go whithersoever your desire takes you throughout the land of the Atlicaligui. Go, and may peace be with you."

¹ From the *Magic Papyrus* of about the 19th dynasty, and translated by M. Chabas.

Anything but sorry for the permission to back out of the royal presence, we took our leave, and, accompanied by a sympathetic and admiring crowd of Deesmunxiatl and royal nobles, made quite a triumphal march to Amu's palace. Sethi and his priests also joined in the procession, and as he bade us adieu on arriving at our destination, Gillett presented him with his *scarabæus* ring, containing an inscription to Amun-Ra. The priest's delight at receiving so valuable a talisman knew no bounds; he almost wept with emotion as he saluted the doctor as a hierophant of the dread Egyptian trinity. Of how many more religions Gillett will be hailed as priest before he dies I cannot guess, yet I will pay him the tribute of saying that his adaptability to any situation always saved us from serious peril. It was his knowledge of hieroglyphs which gave him a warm friend in Sethi, and set in motion the oracle which declared us inviolate!

CHAPTER XVI.

SWEET LOVE-THOUGHTS.

IT is something very pleasurable to feel a perfect sense of security after undergoing a long period of doubt and suspense, uncertain what a day may bring forth, whether the rising sun which we greeted so joyfully may not cast its setting rays upon our unhallowed graves. From this heart-wearing anxiety we were now relieved, and no thought of impending disaster could, for the future, disturb our enjoyment of the good things of the city of Chalco. All had gone well with us—better than we could have hoped for, for the tribulation we had passed through had resulted in raising us to high dignity, and had secured the inviolability of our sacred persons !

Under such conditions as these life could be enjoyed to the utmost, and we each took our pleasures in different ways. Gillett, for instance, passed many hours every day in the sombre recesses of the temple of Ra, poring over ancient papyri, and taking copious notes with the object of writing a history of Olmi from its first colonization to the present time. Unfortunately for science, all our documents and papers relating to this interesting people were irretrievably lost before we left Chalco, so that the doctor's ambitious intentions were entirely frustrated.

Whilst he was thus profitably occupied, I found pleasure, or rather ecstasy, in the summer-house of Amu's gardens,

and in Oosita's companionship. On the morning after our interview with the "Beloved of Ra-teotl," I wandered thither with the princess, and seating her comfortably on the cushions, took my accustomed place by her side. This was the first time I had been alone with her since the events of yesterday, and, as may be imagined, had much to say to her; whereas, strange to tell, she was more than usually quiet and reticent.

"You are very silent to-day; what is the reason of it?" I ventured to ask.

"I am too happy to be talkative," she replied, with a look of such exquisite loveliness that my impressionable heart began to palpitate violently.

"Is it your nature to be silent when happy?" I asked. "In my case, I think joy would make me as garrulous as an old woman."

"But if one has thoughts too great to be rendered intelligible by language, would they not be spoiled by attempting to give them utterance?"

"Perhaps so," I replied. "But if you will endeavour to state one of these lofty ideas in words, I shall be better able to judge."

"They are more beautiful as thoughts than words," said Oosita musingly. "The harsh human voice will destroy the soft celestial music which permeates them."

"Permit me to doubt your assertion," I said tenderly. "As they fall from your lips, I shall imagine a heavenly choir has descended on earth."

She looked at me inquiringly, as if uncertain whether I meant to apply my metaphor to her voice or her thoughts. Her unsophisticated innocence knew nothing of the subtle flattery of the European, and I guessed as much by her answer.

"But the sweet strains exist only in my heart; they can never pass my lips."

"Has your happiness anything to do with the total

defeat of Ambouli, and the decided rebuff he got when he dared to express his willingness to marry you?"

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed eagerly, as a vivid blush mantled her cheeks. "And I have been wishing to thank you for your noble conduct; but every phrase I thought of seemed too cold and empty to utter to a man who had signified his readiness to die rather than see me the wife of the hated Serpent-worshipper. I can only say I thank you, I thank you, although it does not even faintly express the gratitude which fills my heart to overflowing."

"Dear little Oosita!" I exclaimed, clasping her hands in mine. "Dear little Oosita, I have so much affection for you that I would rather see you dead than polluted by a touch from such a savage. If I could wish that, it would not be so great a thing to surrender my own life for your sake."

Her exquisite loveliness seemed doubly exquisite as she again poured forth her thanks, and invoked the choicest blessings of Xexuteotl upon me. She was so perfectly lovely in her agitation that I could not resist looking at her with an expression dangerously near to that of love.

Love is the same all the world over, and its glances can be interpreted with the same ease by the men and women of all nations, whether civilized or uncivilized. Oosita caught my ardent gaze fixed upon her, and after a swift, bewildered look, her voice faltered, and she began to tremble violently. Had I suddenly awoke the sleeping soul of love in her heart? Had my admiration carried me too far, and forced my eyes to say that I loved her, when I well knew that worldly prudence would constrain my lips to give the lie to my heart? Never before had Oosita trembled at my look, nor quailed before me with blushing face. Yet it was very pleasant to think myself beloved by so sweet a creature, and I turned away from her with a sigh, half of pleasure, half of pain, for fear of being tempted to repeat the experiment once more.

For a few moments we sat silent, occupied with our thoughts. But such inaction soon became wearisome, for I was very much in the position of a moth who seeks the light, and refuses to be warned of his danger though his wings be singed badly. Once again I faced Oosita, and with many an inward resolve to keep the door of my lips and guard closely the expression in my eyes, resumed the conversation.

If there is a fever called "Living," surely there is also one called "Loving." Five minutes' talk on ordinary topics merely served to increase the fire which was gnawing at my heart; this short abstention from a caressing look or word drove the fever flames to my head, and set up a delirium of recklessness. In vain did Prudence urge me to depart, and leave the too lovely Princess of Chalco to wed one of her own valiant race; in vain did Conscience loudly proclaim the cruelty of trifling with so pure and innocent a being. I was but a moth, with brains reduced to the level of that insect by the frenzy of love which consumed me, and so, moth-like, I turned again to the brilliancy of the light, and began to singe my wings afresh.

"Is the white man still an object of terror to you, now that you have had an opportunity of studying him for some weeks?" I asked, with the mean intention of extorting a paeon of praise.

"You have untaught all the previous ideas I had formed concerning him," she replied, looking up at me with a happy smile. "Instead of believing him to be cruel, false, and treacherous, I now regard him as humane, self-sacrificing, and generous. Where I expected to see deceit and cunning, I have found nothing but the noblest qualities."

Dear artless little thing! She fell into my trap most unsuspectingly, and as my self-conceit told me that this laudation was meant for me, I thirsted to hear more.

"Your estimate of the white man is a very high one," I

said. "Do you think it possible for the whole race to be endowed with such virtues? Do you think that all the English are as superlatively good as you have painted them?"

"Oh no, not all!" she answered quickly. "It is not given to every one to be so noble, so heroic, as—as—"

"As whom?" I half whispered, hoping to help her out of her hesitation.

"As you!" she replied, so softly that I could scarcely catch the answer.

"Whatever makes you place me so far in advance of the others?" I asked, with a cruelty I would not have dared to practise upon an accomplished young lady of Paris or London. I even added point to my question by repossessing myself of her hands.

"Because you are kind and gentle," she began bravely. "Because you saved me from the Anaconda, and from Ambouli. Because you are—"

She hesitated, and could not complete her sentence, and I was cruel enough to enjoy her pretty confusion, and refused to help her out of it because it made her look so charming. Once she raised her large, lustrous eyes to mine imploringly, but I was obdurate, though I longed to take the sweet girl to my heart and translate her thoughts for her.

Never was I nearer beseeching a woman to be my wife than I was at this moment, and my tongue was only restrained by a tender feeling of compassion, induced by a wave of compunction for my bad taste in leading the poor child on. I had dragged from her almost a confession of love, and, as I looked into my own heart to see how far I could return it, I was astounded to find that she had become infinitely dear to me.

Here, then, I stood at a crisis of my life; and, as I realized its gravity, Gillett's warning poured itself in floods into my consciousness. But why need I hesitate when

inclination urged me to unite my life with hers? Her manners, thoughts, and ideas would have graced any court in Europe; her complexion was not nearly so dark as that of many Spanish ladies I have met; her face and figure were superb enough to make her the reigning belle of the season; and as to the changing fashions of the hour, she would soon accommodate herself to them. I felt truly that I should be proud of my foreign wife anywhere, and should experience the keenest delight at witnessing her inevitable social triumphs. Added to all this, I possessed an income sufficiently large to place every luxury and comfort at her disposal.

This was one view of the case, which utterly ignored Gillett's gloomy predictions, took no impartial view of Oosita's feelings, and was simply an argument for self. I was forced now to ask myself this question: What would be the effect on Oosita if I transplanted my tropical flower to a dreary land of fogs and mist, where a cold formality usurped the place of the natural display of the feelings, and a thinly-veiled immorality passed current for Christian virtue? It was the unhealthy influence of society that I dreaded almost as much as the debilitating action of a bleak northern climate upon a child of the sun. Residence within the pale of civilization, and beneath the shadow of its gigantic selfishness, would take the freshness off her simplicity and the bloom off her charming innocence.

The tone of my thoughts was not very flattering to the people amongst whom I was born, but it was due to the contrast I could not help making between them and the Deesmunxiatli. The latter were living exemplifications of the power of Christianity to make man—even the humblest—live a great and noble life, full of unselfishness and consideration for others. Could I truthfully say that religion as forcibly affected the every-day conduct of my own race, or, indeed, that they had any religion at all save in name? Agnosticism, indifference, the devotion of the day set apart

for worship to balls, lawn-tennis parties, and river picnics, instead of the prayer of thankfulness to the Creator, proved to me that love for the Deity had died out, and that a blasphemous, intolerable magnification of Self, euphemistically called Humanity with a capital H, had usurped His holy place.

Would it not be a crime to transplant Oosita from the one spot on earth where God was adored in all the purity and beauty of holiness, to a country where He was worshipped with the lips by a people whose hearts were far away, and who loved Mammon better than righteousness? If I ventured on such a step, would not her moral nature receive a shock, and her purity revolt against the state of things she would find in every European community? And if this should happen, what would be the result? Would she gradually overcome her intense repugnance, accept the position, and become as frivolous and worldly as the rest? As I thought of her like this, my heart cried out in bitterness, for I could not imagine Oosita otherwise than the sweet, charming, pure-minded girl she now was. No, she could never sink to this level. Her purity would not permit her to dwell with the impure; she would pine away, until her freed soul could fly to the heaven of her innocence.

All these reflections passed through my mind like a lightning flash whilst the princess was still hesitating over her incomplete sentence. But my cruel mood was over, and a gush of infinite tenderness took its place as I resolved, for her own sweet sake, to forego the love I now knew I possessed and should keep warm in my heart for ever.

I experienced a sharp pang as I proceeded to carry out my resolution by turning the conversation to a topic less dangerous. I steeled my heart with vigorous energy against the sweet fascination which stole, unknown, from her beautiful eyes; I closed my ears to the soft music of her voice; I strove against admiring her elegant graces of

manner; in short, I endeavoured to banish her image and to set up in its place an ordinary, commonplace woman.

She accepted my calm, almost frigid attentions at first with surprise, then with resignation, and thus the surface of our lives' current, for that time at least, ran smoothly again, undisturbed by the bubbling up of the threatening torrents of passion, or by any further reference on her part to my deeds of heroism or acts of goodness. What was passing beneath the surface of her quiet self-possession I could but guess at, and hope that she did not blame me too severely.

When we parted, which we did much sooner than usual, I retired to my room to meditate upon all the mischief I had done in thrusting myself into Oosita's society, making my companionship a necessity to her, and wooing her with eyes if not with words. If ever a man received a severe moral castigation I was that one, for I loved my sweet princess so dearly that I felt as angry with myself as if I had done her a physical injury.

Thanks to Gillett's absence at the temple of Ra-teotl, I was enabled to fight my battle all alone, and to assume a quieter demeanour long before he was due to return. But beneath this calm exterior there raged a fire of love, and an irresistible longing for her presence. I attempted to crush it down by telling myself that time, which softens all things, would cure this grief, and leave me free to pass on and enjoy life once more, though it would be bereft of that glamour which encircles a first love as with a holy halo. But what was the world to me without this glamour? Youth, love, enthusiasm, would all depart beneath the weight of this heavy blow, and make me an old man with a seared heart before my time. O for a glass of the waters of Lethe to blot out all memory of Oosita and my love for her!

*"What can I do to drive away
Remembrance from my eyes? for they have seen,*

*Aye, an hour ago, my brilliant Queen!
Touch has a memory. O say, love, say
What can I do to kill it and be free
In my old liberty?"*

Gillett burst in upon me, hot and breathless, whilst I was in this disconsolate mood. Fortunately he was too excited to notice my listless depression, for he had discovered a Phœnician papyrus amongst the treasures of the temple, and which Sethi translated for him. Although the document was merely a receipt, yet it proved uncontestedly that the merchants of Tyre and Sidon traded with ports on the Mexican Gulf. At any other time I should have been exceedingly interested, but I was now so utterly out of touch with things in general that I forgot to express the slightest pleasure at so important a find. This omission drew the keen eyes of the doctor upon me, and a searching glance from head to foot.

"You look pale, Wrenforth," he said at last. "Don't you feel well?"

"I have a slight headache," I replied. "The weather has got so insufferably hot."

"You don't take enough exercise," he answered with a most doctorial air. "The liver is bound to get wrong in a hot climate if you persist in leading a sedentary life. Give up mooning about that summer-house all the morning, and ask Amu to organize a few hunting expeditions. As soon as I have finished with these papyri, I intend to use my muscles a little more, or I shall tumble to pieces myself."

"You think it's my liver that's wrong, do you?" I inquired. "Strange to say, I fancied it was my heart!"

"Pooh!" growled the doctor. "Your heart is as sound as a bell, although it may get a little irregular from indigestion. It is a fact worth knowing that the nerves—"

"In mercy spare me a physiological lecture!" I exclaimed, starting up irritably. "My head, liver, heart, or any other organ you please, aches so abominably, that a discourse on nerves would kill me off."

"You must be bad to be so confoundedly irritable!" said the doctor, coolly surveying me. "Where is the pain?"

"In my liver."

"Absurd!"

"Well then, in the heart!"

"Bosh!"

"Anywhere you like then," I shouted angrily. "Why ask me if you know better than I do?"

The doctor looked me up and down for a minute without speaking.

"Look here, Wrenforth," he said at last. "Are you trying to make a fool of me, or have you succeeded in making a fool of yourself?"

"Ask me that question on the 1st of April," was my not very gracious reply.

"Your headache is all moonshine, Wrenforth. It is your nervous system which is wrong, particularly that portion of it which is supposed to govern the temper, although, as in your case, it sometimes fails in its action."

"You possess the gift of aggravation to a fearful extent," I retorted. "If I have lost my temper, as you so learnedly insinuate, it is surely needless to make me worse than ever by your cynical remarks."

"But I want to get at the root of it," persisted the doctor, who had a horrid knack of trying to get at the root of everything, even of things which never did and never could possess roots! "There must be a cause for this ruffling of your usual placidity, and the only one I can think of is—Oosita."

"For goodness' sake do not drag that poor girl into our quarrel," I exclaimed.

"It takes two to make a quarrel," answered Gillett with exasperating coolness. "I engaged myself to travel with you as your *Fidus Achates*, and intend to act up to the character with all its disagreeables until dismissed. My plain duty is

to obtrude my advice upon you, no matter how nauseous I know it to be. Now, I have warned you once before to beware of falling in love with Oosita, and I venture to repeat the caution unless I am, as I fear, too late. But, even then, your dejected manner tells me that you have proposed and been rejected."

"Wrong again, O well-meaning but brusque friend!" I exclaimed, very much soothed by the kindly ring in his voice. "I am suffering agonies at this moment from having refrained from asking her to be my wife. I was on the point of doing so, and of flinging aside all the worldly wisdom you tried to din into me, when the thought struck me that she would lose much more than ever I could give her if I urged her into marriage. The fact is, she is too good for me, or for London, or for any of our European sin-begrimed cities."

"Then let her rest in peace in the purer atmosphere of El Dorado," said the doctor. "Here she will not pluck the fruit of the tree of good and evil; but if transplanted to a vitiated climate she will become a sadder woman, and will learn to shrink from her kind with loathing. Do not put her to such an ordeal, and in having mercy upon her you will be sparing yourself."

"Alas! I fear that my resolution, so strong now, may utterly break down the next time I meet her. I am alone in the world; you are the only friend I possess. Therefore it seems terribly hard that when the revelation of woman's love bursts upon me, and opens my long-closed heart to the sweet possibilities of the future, I must maintain silence and let my brief glimpse of perfect happiness drift away into the unknown."

"It is better so," said Gillett softly. "And you will thank me hereafter for persuading you to keep resolutely out of any entanglements of this description whilst in Chalco."

Pursuant to the course to which I had committed myself,

I abstained as much as possible from Oosita's society, but regulated my conduct so as not to let it appear that I was wanting in courtesy. I sat beside her at dinner that evening as usual, talked to her with assumed ease upon indifferent topics, and did not let her see that I noticed how *distracte* and silent she was. The next morning, instead of calling her for our ramble in the gardens, I announced my intention of spending the day with Gillett in turning over the musty Egyptian papyri—an announcement which my *Fidus Achates* received with a look of astonishment and content. I gathered from that glance that he did not place much faith in the strength of my resolutions. The following day I thought there would be no breach of resolve if I smoked my cigar in the gardens, so I accordingly strolled about for a long time at some distance from, but well in view of, the summer-house. But no flutter of white robes obscured the clear view, and no sound of tiny, sandalled footsteps rewarded my listening ear. I went again the next morning, and waited, and listened, and longed, but no Oosita appeared to still the passionate throbbing of my heart.

It was strange that she should have given up the *tête-à-têtes* at the same time that I did. Had my vehemence and half-expressed passion at our last interview terrified her into keeping away? Was it mere maidenly modesty which made her shrink from seeing me alone, or was it that, having guessed at my love, she wished to avoid its declaration because she could not return it? The last idea was torture, for I hoped to carry away with me to England the recollection that I was beloved and would never be forgotten. How selfish I was at this moment! I did not stop to remember that if her heart were mine it would break when I said good-bye for ever. It were better for her peace of mind a thousand times over, that she should hate and detest rather than love me.

The days drew their weary lengths along, and Oosita

and I drifted more and more apart. We only met at the dinner-hour now, and our conversation was intermittent and devoid of the sprightliness which used to characterize it. It was evident that she was not happy, and I dared to think that I was the cause of her drooping, listless manner, so utterly unlike the brilliant, sparkling Oosita of a week ago.

All this heartache and incessant control of my feelings so depressed me that I really began to feel ill. The ever-watchful doctor noticed my altered looks, and gave up his researches at the temple of Ra, in order, as he said, to recruit his own health by a little more vigorous exertion. In reality, as I afterwards found out, he relinquished his studies at a most interesting point on purpose to be with me and cheer up my drooping spirits. He little thought, as he folded the last papyri, that he would never inspect them again.

When Gillett commenced his holiday, he did so with a vengeance, for he hunted up Amu's huntsmen, consulted with them as to good localities for big game, and arranged a series of grand battues for many days to come. The sight of his brisk, bustling manner and his untiring energy was enough to do any one good ; and as he was careful to keep me well occupied so as to give me scant time to brood over my miseries, I really began to feel better, and lost, in activity, some of that intolerable craving for Oosita's presence.

Our hunts became the talk and the wonder of Chalco. Never before had these people seen the deadly power of an express rifle, and their awe and astonishment as they watched a puma or antelope fall dead sixty yards off was quite ludicrous.

It became quite the fashion for people who had nothing to do to ask permission to join the party, in order that they might verify the wonderful tales they had heard of the white lords' thunder-and-lightning tubes. We noticed as

a significant fact, that not a single noble of the Tlilcoatl tribe ever expressed a wish to accompany our hunting parties. I was sorry they did not, for, of all people in the world, I should have liked to have demonstrated to them the swift and terrible force with which we were armed, as a hint to keep their truculence in subjection.

During the bustle and excitement of the chase I became the keen sportsman to the exclusion of everything else ; but when the hours of indolence left me nothing to do, the old craving returned. My real happiness came at the time when the ladies retired, for then Oosita would advance with the others, and, placing her hand on my forehead, would murmur, "Xexuteotl be with thee." Her eyes were always resolutely averted from my ardent gaze, yet the sight of her beautiful figure, moving with supple and graceful undulations, awoke all the slumbering fire in my heart, and made me realize with absolute certainty that my life's happiness was inextricably bound up with hers—that a passion had seized hold of the innermost fibres of my soul which nothing but the sweet companionship of this lovely Princess of the Tropics could assuage.

This feeling became intensified night by night as she drew near and uttered her sweet and holy wish, until one evening I tried by every means in my power to make her raise her eyes to mine. The concentrated intensity of my look, and the magnetic sympathy which emanated from it, forced her to turn her face to me as she laid her taper fingers on my forehead.

It was a sorrowful, almost tearful gaze that I encountered, the sadness of it being heightened by such an expression of wistfulness that I thought she looked more beautiful, if possible, in her sorrow than in her joy. The look on her features sent a thrill of anguish through me, and I would have cast prudence to the winds and settled my fate then and there, had there not been a crowd of people around us. What a fool I had been with all my punctilious compunc-

tions ! If she loved me, her happiness would not be confined to any one locality, but would be centred in her husband, and surely I was strong enough to shield her from all the vague evils my irresolute heart had conjured up ! Why had I let my golden opportunity slip by that morning in the summer-house ? Why had I not then relieved, with a few words, this state of tension which was agony to me and sorrow to her ? As it was, hours or days might pass before I could succeed in getting her alone again—days of mental torture which I could easily have avoided had I not allowed a lot of chimerical ideas to bias my better judgment.

I looked into her eyes and saw the change that my deeply-felt though unspoken feelings were beginning to effect there. The wistful, sorrowful yearning gradually faded, and gave place to astonishment ; then, after an infinitesimal hesitation, a sweet smile beamed forth, and a joyous look swallowed up the previous sadness. She had interpreted my thoughts by that swift sympathy of love which requires no language, no words, but which, by virtue of its magnetic power, enables Mind to read Mind and Soul to commune with Soul. We had told one another our secret, and with the sweet knowledge thus obtained I felt an inexpressible sense of peace and gladness steal over me.

How fondly and earnestly I returned her salutation and murmured, “ Xexuteotl be with thee.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CLOUD FROM THE EAST.

FROM the moment when the mute confession of love took place, Oosita's bright gaiety and happy laughter returned, making her more lovely and piquant than ever. Though our solitary rambles in the gardens were never renewed, yet we often met and talked once more with the old freedom. No words of love ever passed our lips, but my tender expressions and air of appropriation were thoroughly understood and answered by the soft and enrapturing light which beamed from her eyes into mine.

Life had again become worth living. With the certainty of Oosita's love, how could I help being blithe and merry? Gillett was delighted to see me in such wonderful spirits, and attributed the change to the tremendous amount of exercise he had forced me to take. I allowed him to hug his belief, for I was coward enough to shrink from the torrent of invective I knew he would pour on my devoted head, if I informed him of its true cause.

There was only one black spot on the brightness of the horizon to interfere with perfect enjoyment, and it was so minute that we could afford to disregard it. I allude to the sullen, hostile attitude of Ambouli and his clan, fostered by Cephren's proclamation of our inviolability, which had been published from every pyramid in the city the day after our trial. It had reached our ears that the reading of the edict had provoked many disloyal murmurs in the

Tlilcoatl quarter, and that these people had been in a state of ferment ever since, declaring it to be a monstrous iniquity for a priest of Ra-teotl to claim as sacred, those who were proper victims of their goddess.

Notwithstanding these expressions of dislike towards ourselves, we were permitted to pass unmolested into the disaffected districts, in which were situated the various manufacturing industries, such as gold-extracting, cloth-making, feather-embroidering, stone-cutting, and all the numerous arts which ministered to the comfort and luxury of this magnificent city. I was surprised to find, amongst the Atlicaligui, an excellent knowledge of the lapidary's art, a craft hitherto believed to have been unknown to the ancients. I now came to the conclusion that it was practised in the days of remotest antiquity, but, like many other sciences, had become lost or lain forgotten whilst generations of men and women had been content to adorn their headgear and robes with uncut and unpolished diamonds or rubies. Our Queen's Koh-i-noor, obtained, on the annexation of the Punjab, in the rough state, and weighing about 900 carats, was by bad cutting reduced to about 123 carats! Such a serious accident would be an impossibility with the hereditary lapidaries of the Atlicaligui, for their skill had been transmitted from father to son for so many thousand years that they had arrived at an almost absolute perfection in the art.

We did not let the animosity of the Tlilcoatli disturb our equanimity, but enjoyed ourselves to the utmost and revelled delightedly in the pomp and circumstance of a civilization which European *savants* vainly imagined had long ago disappeared from the face of the earth—indeed we almost began to identify ourselves with this semi-Asiatic, thoroughly old-world life. The exquisite of Pall Mall and the aristocratic beauty of Belgravia seemed like things seen in a dream, of which nothing but a dim, misty recollection remained ; whilst the stately form of Amu with his

diamond-decked helmet of gold and his feather-work cloak, and the exquisitely-proportioned Oosita clad in a wondrously becoming robe tastefully decorated with costly jewels, made me look upon the present as the past—upon Amu as an Agamemnon, and his lovely daughter as a matchless Helen!¹

O halcyon days of love and peace and pleasure! Even as I look back upon the perfect enjoyments you brought me, my heart swells with regret that I know the sweet simplicity of El Dorado no more. Your remembrance fills my soul with aversion at the cold, heartless formality in the midst of which I am constrained to dwell. Instead of the open-hearted truthfulness of the Deesmunxiatl, I am brought face to face with an insincerity which affects to be my dearest friend because of the filthy lucre with which I am endowed; in place of the free-handed generosity of the Chalconians, I experience those petty follies which endeavour to make parsimony pass current for lavish display; wherever I turn in this England of ours, I see men and women trying to be what they can never be, and am met on every side with gigantic shams thinly gilded over with a tinsel of truth.

How fleeting a thing is happiness! The moment we grasp it and raise it to our lips to taste its fullness, it mockingly takes wing and flies away. Even so was it with my joyous Chalco life, which is now but a pleasant spot in my remembrance; yet could I return thither to live the same life amidst the same familiar kindly faces, I would cheerfully undergo all the privations and miseries the journey would entail. However, as that has become an impossibility, I console myself with a proverb culled from the wisdom of the high priest of Ra-teotl—"Rivers, torrents, streams, move onward to their destination; not

¹ I allude to Helen of Troy as being the most lovely woman the world has ever seen, and consequently more worthy to be compared with Oosita than Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia, about whose beauty I know nothing.

one flows back to its pleasant source in the fragrant wilderness. The things of yesterday are no more to-day ; and the things of to-day shall cease perhaps on the morrow."

This is a melancholy preface to the events I have to relate, but, as I recall them to memory, it is but natural that my thoughts should be tinged with a gloomy sadness. For us the bright and happy day was departing, and the dark Morrow swiftly approaching, although it gave but scant notice of the desolating miseries it would pour out over us, as an awful contrast to the brilliant and luxurious existence we were now indulging in. The old Egyptian soothsayer was right in her prediction, for the dark, misty cloud was coming rapidly out of the east, from beneath the kingdom of Ra, to enshroud us suddenly in the black meshes of its veil.

Gillett and I were preparing to start off on a hunting expedition when the cloud burst, and it came upon us in the form of Chotil, who suddenly rushed into our presence with eyes glaring with savagery and face aflame with passion. We could see that he had some very important news to communicate, but Gillett was a stern disciplinarian, and as our guide had omitted to pay us the customary marks of respect, he severely called his attention to it.

"This is no time for salutations, but for vengeance!" exclaimed Chotil with lips quivering with ferocity, although he obeyed orders by making a respectful *salaam*.

"Now you can proceed with your tale," said Gillett, who was as anxious as I was to hear what had so upset the stolidity of our Indian.

"You made a rule that none of the men should ever absent themselves from their quarters at night-time," began Chotil. "This rule has never been broken until this morning, when, on calling the muster-roll, I found that two were absent."

"I made the order for their own protection," replied

Gillett. "But the fact of their being absent is barely sufficient to account for your passionate aspect."

"No, indeed, it is not!" answered the chief, grinding his teeth with fury. "The worst has yet to be told you. They were returning home from the Tlilcoatl quarter last evening after sundown, when they were waylaid by the priests, who intend to sacrifice them to the Serpent goddess this morning."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, aghast for the moment at such terrible news. But as I remembered the impunity with which we had wandered about the city I became less anxious, and hoped that Chotil's information was a gross exaggeration.

"Such a violation of the King's command is an impossibility," I continued. "He has proclaimed us all to be sacred, and these priests would scarcely dare to run the risk of severe punishment in order to obtain two victims for their altars."

"Every word I have spoken is truth," said Chotil excitedly. "Listen to this. There is a Tlileoatl youth, a Christian, who is courting one of the girls employed about the palace. I saw him a few minutes ago, and he told me the news under promise of secrecy, for his tribe would kill him if they found out that he had betrayed their priests' intention."

"It may be true," said Gillett. "And if so, I cannot foresee the end of the business, for we must not tamely submit to such a gross and brutal insult. However, I will find and interrogate Chotil's informant myself."

So saying, the doctor left the room, and during his absence the chief again worked himself up to a fearful pitch of fury, and I had the greatest difficulty in preventing his shouting out his war-whoop of "*Scarrawoee*"—a cry which would have aroused in his followers a perfect paroxysm of bloodthirsty madness. I was greatly relieved when Gillett returned, although he only brought a con-

firmation of Chotil's disastrous intelligence, together with the additional fact that Ambouli was meditating getting the whole of us into his clutches and offering us up to his goddess.

"We must appeal to the King without delay to stop this conspiracy against us," I exclaimed indignantly. "Let us consult with Amu about it at once."

"The Serpent-worshipper has well chosen his time," said Gillett bitterly. "The Tlilcoatli guard the palace, and Amu has this very morning been sent unexpectedly to inspect some point on the frontier."

"What of that?" I asked impatiently. "We cannot be refused admittance to Cephren!"

"I am afraid we should never gain his royal ear," said the doctor. "Besides, during Amu's absence, the Deesmunxiatli will not dare to help us."

"Then our position seems to be this," I answered. "That we cannot stir hand or foot until after our Indians have been massacred. If our informant speaks truth, they will be offered up this morning; Amu does not return till late at night, and the Tlilcoatli at the palace will keep us dangling about there all day seeking for an audience, or until the fatal deed is consummated."

"We appear to be utterly helpless until Amu's return," muttered the doctor.

"We shall lose *prestige* both with the Atlicaligui and our Indians if we calmly submit to the contemplated outrage," I exclaimed savagely. "We are bound to rescue the captives at all hazards, even if we have to storm the place in which they are confined."

The doctor did not answer, but walked restlessly up and down the apartment in great perplexity. Chotil watched him with eyes glaring like a jaguar's, whilst I stood patiently awaiting the result of the Machi's cogitations. At last he ceased his perambulations and spoke—

"We are in a desperate dilemma, Wrenforth. To resign

ourselves to this cold-blooded murder is tantamount to earning the contempt of all right-thinking men. But to disturb the peace of Chalco by making war on Ambouli is like inviting destruction, not only on ourselves, but possibly on the friends who shelter us. Yet this vile deed must not be perpetrated, and since the enemy has chosen to close the avenues of legal redress against us, we must take the law into our own hands. In my opinion, therefore, we ought to march promptly into the Tlilcoatl quarter, and if our peaceable demand for the prisoners' surrender is not immediately complied with, to fight our way to their prison and set them at liberty."

"Your words entirely echo my sentiments," I replied.

"Then muster the men immediately," continued Gillett to Chotil. "Let them take revolver as well as rifle, for we have some hard work to get through before we re-enter this palace."

Chotil gave us a fiendish glance, which fully expressed his delight at our having decided to go on the war-path, and then hurriedly left to parade his followers.

Our feelings were not those of unmixed pleasure as we contemplated the desperate enterprise to which we were now pledged. The tribe of Tlilcoatl could place in the field a fighting force of nearly four thousand men, to which we could oppose only twenty rifles. The project therefore seemed utterly foolhardy, and so it would have been under ordinary circumstances. But our safety consisted in keeping up a reputation, and if we once allowed it to get tarnished, even ever so little, our *prestige* would vanish and leave us exposed to the incessant attacks of pitiless enemies. An exhibition of moral courage, as well as of fearlessness, had thus become an absolute necessity, and we hoped to strike terror into the hearts of the Serpent-worshippers, more by the deafening reports of our rifles than by the ridiculous paucity of our numbers.

Our preparations for the march were soon completed, as

time was valuable, for even now the ghastly sacrifice might be commencing. To my regret the ladies of Amu's family were not yet visible, and I had to leave without a single word to Oosita—without one clasp of her hand, the pressure of which was almost as eloquent as a glance from her eyes. Just before starting, Gillett despatched a messenger to the lord of the Diamond Cross acquainting him with our determination to effect the release of the prisoners at all costs, and begging him to give us his countenance and assistance if any necessity arose.

We placed ourselves at the head of the Indians, whose courage had been roused by Chotil to the utmost pitch of ferocity, and then passed out of the courtyard towards the *teocalli* of Tlilcoatl. As we threaded our way through the busy streets of the Deesmunxiatl quarter the people thronged to the doorways to look at us. It was no idle curiosity that prompted them to do so, for the news of the capture of the Indians had spread like wildfire throughout the city, and with it our determination to rescue them. Our resolute bearing and savage demeanour told the onlookers very plainly that we were not men to be trifled with, and murmurs of admiration, mingled with wishes for our success, met us all along the route. This served to encourage us, but here and there a pitying exclamation damped our ardour. "They are too good for the sacrificial stone, and yet they cannot hope for victory against Ambouli's legions," said one. "Nothing but the power of Xexuteotl can save them from the consequences of so rash an action," said another. And thus we ran the gauntlet of praise, pity, and criticism, until we debouched into the grand square. Here we made a slight detour to the right, coming in contact with a company of the King's Tlilcoatl guard, who, however, contented themselves with scowling at us; then we turned to the left, up a broad avenue, which took us straight toward the square in which the *teocalli* of the Serpent goddess was situated.

We had now entered the enemy's quarter, and at once saw that something unusual was going on. In the distance a huge, surging crowd occupied the space in front of the pyramid, and employed its leisure in hoarse, frenzied shouting; intermingled with this uproar was the clang of brazen instruments, and the loud, monotonous beating of drums. Even as far off as we were, we could not view the turbulent scene without feeling that the mob had worked itself up to a state of mad religious excitement, which had let loose the worst passions of Pandemonium.

"It will require a very determined charge to break through that crowd," I exclaimed, as my eyes wandered over our small but compact body of men, almost microscopic in comparison with the seething hordes of the enemy.

"It will indeed," replied Gillett. "I would give anything for a ten minutes' loan of half a company of British soldiers with fixed bayonets. With them we would scatter the heathen like chaff before the wind. As it is, we must do the best we can with our semi-disciplined Indians, who are ready to fight till death, now that their blood is up. But I greatly fear that valour is not so much required at this juncture as cohesion, for should the Tlilcoatli make an ugly rush and separate us, our fate would be sealed."

"Well, if it is not our lot to come out of this scrape alive, I intend to have one satisfaction," I muttered between my clenched teeth. "If I can only give that fellow Ambouli his *quietus*, I think I shall draw my last breath with greater pleasure!"

"We shall not have time to say much more to each other, for here come the Tlilcoatli warriors to bar our progress," said Gillett, pointing to the advancing mass. "Now, my dear boy," he continued, grasping my hand, "as we are neither of us insured against accidents, it may possibly happen that a knock on the head may prostrate you or me. If I am the victim, I know I can trust you to break the news gently to the dear old people in Sussex.

Should you be the unfortunate one, whom do you wish me to communicate with?"

"I have no one to mourn my death," I replied. "The heir-at-law is a man I have never seen. Tell him at any rate, and he will give a champagne supper to celebrate my apotheosis!"

How I longed to give the doctor a tender, loving message for Oosita! But his cynical opposition sealed my lips, for I dared not risk hearing a contemptuous word from my friend which he might never have a chance of unsaying.

The Tlilcoatl phalanx halted within fifteen paces of our party, and ostentatiously spread out so as to effectually prevent our passing onward.

"What is the meaning of this?" inquired Gillett, stepping to the front. "We are at peace with you, and desire to march into the square."

"The road is not open to strangers," replied the officer firmly but courteously.

"We are lords of the King's Council, to whom the whole of Chalco is free," urged the doctor.

"The lord of the Tlilcoatli does not recognize you as such. His orders are very precise, and therefore I cannot permit you to pass, being foreigners and aliens in religion, until the completion of the sacrifice. The road will be open by sundown."

"This is rank treason against Cephren!" I exclaimed.

"I obey my chief only," answered the Tlilcoatl officer.

"We will turn back immediately the lord Ambouli surrenders two of my followers whom he has detained," said Gillett persuasively. "Go and tell thy chief this."

"I cannot leave my post," came the shuffling answer.

I was listening attentively to this conversation when a sudden murmur from the distant crowd made me look towards it, and I imagined I could discern a something which seemed like a sacrificial procession wending its way towards the pyramid. I began to have an idea that all this

parleying was carried on by the enemy in order to keep us amused until the tragedy was completed. It did not take me long to acquaint the doctor with my suspicions. His field-glasses were brought into requisition, and revealed an array of white-robed priests marching solemnly from the north side of the square towards the *teocalli*.

"By Jove, you are right!" he exclaimed, shutting the glasses with a vicious snap. "And if they reach the temple before us, our poor Indians are doomed, for we could never storm such a stronghold as that!"

"Give the enemy notice that we intend to move at once," I cried, grasping my sword.

"I have no time for politeness," said Gillett, turning to the Tlilcoatl officer. "Your chief is about to treacherously slay two of my men, and this I will prevent at all hazards. I am now going to advance, and if you attempt to oppose us, our thunder and lightning shall kill you."

As the doctor delivered his ultimatum, I carefully examined my six-chambered revolver, and then listened for the next word.

"Forward!" came the stentorian tones of Gillett.

"Forward!" I echoed. "Keep your men well together, Chotil, and make them fight like devils."

His answer was a guttural "Ugh," and I could see, from the expression of his features, that any Serpent-worshipper who fell into his hands would have a very bad time of it. With set faces and looks more fiendish than human, we commenced our fatal advance. The instant we moved, a long array of lances was pointed at us, but we reserved our fire, being determined to let the enemy commit the first act of hostility. We were now almost touching the bright, copper tips of their weapons, when a flint-headed arrow fell in our midst and wounded an Indian slightly in the hand. This was sufficient for our purpose; the Tlilcoatli had drawn the first blood, and upon them now rested the responsibility of what might ensue.

"Fire!" shouted Gillett, and immediately a rattling volley rang out. Then amidst a perfect storm of yells and groans we charged the enemy, who promptly broke and fled. Over a dozen men must have been laid low by our discharge, but there was no time to count the slain, for it had now become a thorough race between us and the sacrificial procession as to who would reach the pyramid first.

Onward we rushed with increasing speed until we emerged into the square, scattering the throng of sight-seers right and left by the tremendous impetus we had acquired. But our triumphant rush soon received a check, for, as the unarmed masses fled, the vacant space in front of the *teocalli* speedily became filled with a phalanx of warriors, behind which we could distinctly perceive the priests and their two victims moving slowly towards the lowest flight of steps which wound round the outside of the temple, and gave access to its summit, whereon was placed the ghastly sacrificial stone.

We halted within twenty paces of the serried mass and reorganized our disordered ranks. Then the word of command rang out, and we delivered a scathing fire. The men of the opposing force were literally mown down like grass, yet they stood firm, unappalled by our thunder and lightning, and galled us severely with their sharp, obsidian-headed arrows, keen as razors, swift as bullets. Had we not protected our men by making them wear the thick cotton quilted tunic of the country, many would have fallen then and there.

The obstinacy of the enemy caused us the loss of much valuable time. Again and again our rifles rang out, and again and again we charged, but we could effect nothing against their formidable lances and deadly battle-axes. To add to our danger, we perceived a still larger force of the Tlilcoatl, under Ambouli himself, approaching from the opposite side of the square. If he effected a junction before we could gain the stairway of the temple, our

position would become so precarious that we should have either to make an ignominious retreat or fight on until annihilated. Another source of annoyance came from the large crowd of non-combatants who, seeing us held in check, now ventured to hang on our rear and flanks in small groups and harass us with showers of quartz and a few whizzing arrows. As yet every one of us had marvellously escaped from anything more serious than a few scratches, but I could not help feeling that another two or three such desperate charges as we had been making must result in a long list of fatalities, even if any of us survived to tell the tale.

By this time the sacrificial procession had commenced to ascend the first stairway. I was enabled to catch a glimpse of the victims as they strained their eyes towards their friends whom they knew were battling for their liberty against such fearful odds. There was an eager, expectant look on their faces, as if they felt sure that their Machi would deliver them; they raised their bound hands above their heads, and moved their lips as if saying something, but the terrific din and uproar prevented my hearing a syllable. It was evident that if our next charge failed to break through the enemy's obstinate ranks, all further effort would be in vain, for the priests would by that time have reached the first terrace and have left the lower steps free to be defended by soldiers.

"One more desperate attempt," I shouted to Chotil. "We must break through this time, or our friends will be sacrificed."

The Indians answered with a blood-curdling war-whoop, delivered a volley, and charged with the frantic energy of desperation. Again I found myself in the thick of the fray, shooting and thrusting until my arms fairly ached; all sense of environment left me, and I saw nothing but a blood-tinged scene, in which men appeared as demons thirsting for each other's lives.

When intellect for a moment superseded the brute

instinct which had taken possession of me, I found to my astonishment that I was battling on the lowest step of the pyramid. How I got there I know not, for I was fully twenty yards away from the thick of the fight and struggling alone against a set of yelling fiends, who were hacking and hewing away at me with the disagreeable intention of reducing me to mincemeat. Death seemed an absolute certainty unless my comrades arrived very quickly to the rescue. I cast a despairing glance upwards and caught sight of the last white-robed priest disappearing round the angle of the building ; then I looked down, and saw the raging faces of my savage foes, cruelly confident of capturing or killing me. I knew that they would take me alive if possible, for I should be a most acceptable sacrifice to the Serpent goddess, and therefore made up my mind to give myself the *coup de grâce* the moment I found escape was entirely cut off. In all probability their very eagerness to obtain me as a victim was the means of saving me at this juncture.

My object now was to gain the first terrace, and if I found it free from the enemy, I might still have a chance, for with my revolver I could defend the narrow stairway leading to it for some time—perhaps long enough to enable Gillett to come to the rescue. Seizing my opportunity, I shot the nearest assailant dead, and then like lightning darted up the stairs, and arrived safe and sound at the terrace, which I fortunately found unoccupied by the foe. With the last shot in my revolver I killed the foremost pursuer, and as he fell amongst those pressing behind him and threw them into confusion, I gained time to reload. Barely was this accomplished, when the Tlilcoatli made such a determined rush that I was compelled to empty all six chambers before I could cool their ardour ; but the spectacle of six of their bravest falling before my little weapon in scarcely more than as many seconds, induced them to retire as precipitately as they had advanced.

Their retreat to the foot of the stairs gave me breathing time, during which I was enabled to look around and calculate my chances of deliverance. Below, and not quite ten yards to the right, I saw Gillett and the Indians hemmed in by the Tlilcoatl phalanx, and fighting with desperate valour. They were steadily gaining ground, and inspired me with the hope that they would be able to join me in a few more minutes, particularly if I kept the staircase clear by sweeping it with my revolver. All these events had taken place so quickly that Ambouli had not yet been able to reach the fray; but he and his soldiers were now so perilously close that I raised a warning shout, and then recommenced the slaughter by picking off successively as many officers as I could.

From my position, which projected out from the wall of the pyramid, I could see the sacrificial procession wending its way to the summit. I fired a few more shots, then again cast my eyes upwards, and saw with horror that it had gained the platform containing the altar and the image of the Serpent goddess. I was spellbound for a moment whilst I watched the chief priest deliberately assume a blood-red mantle, emblematic of the foul deed he was about to perpetrate. With an effort I threw off the sickening feeling of horror which was paralyzing me, and nerved myself for the desperate task of attempting to save the victims. The horror soon became replaced by a mad, demoniac craving to get within striking distance of the fiends who were about to commit so cruel and murderous a torture. I forgot Gillett and the necessity of keeping the stairway clear for him. I forgot everything in my mad excitement, and gave up the coign of vantage with only one idea in my brain—that of saving the Indians. As if possessed, I dashed frantically up the steps, round the terraces, then up the stairway again, until I burst upon the astonished priests like an avalanche.

One victim was already stretched upon the huge convex

altar. His breast was bare, and the scarlet-robed priest stood by with his knife of obsidian, in readiness to make the incision which would expose the palpitating heart. The attendants held the wretched man firmly in position, and seemed gloating over the infernal torture they were about to witness, when the sharp crack of my revolver summarily arrested the sacrifice. The scarlet ruffian staggered a few paces, then, with a convulsive leap, crashed over the side of the pyramid and fell, with a sickening thud, amidst the furiously battling crowd below. A regular stampede took place amongst the priests, who fled down the stairs up which I had just ascended.

I was so occupied in watching the hideous termination of the chief priest's life, that I forgot, for the moment, to consider my own safety. I was disagreeably recalled to a sense of my dangerous position by suddenly finding myself pinioned from behind by two men, whose object was, I soon ascertained, to hurl me off the unprotected platform after their chief. I struggled desperately to free myself from the toils, but in my exhausted condition I was no match for these muscular and sinewy foes, and I saw that I was being forced slowly but surely to the edge, over which there was a drop of more than two hundred and fifty feet. My revolver had been knocked out of my hand the moment I was pinioned, and my arms were so fatigued from the hacking and hewing they had performed, that they were almost powerless. Still I feebly struggled to avert the catastrophe, but so near was I now to the abyss that, as we whirled around, I caught an occasional glimpse of the battle raging below. The near view of the terrible leap I should soon be forced to take turned me giddy with terror, and an awful fear usurped the place of my reckless courage. To this succeeded the calmness of despair. It was useless to strive any longer, for I was utterly exhausted, whilst my two enemies seemed to gather fresh strength as I grew feebler. I had now been forced to the

very verge of the platform, and in another moment would be flying through the air to destruction. In this awful crisis I determined that my executioners should die with me, and accordingly by one final frantic effort I encircled each with an arm that stubbornly refused to be dislodged from its embrace. This manœuvre inspired them with some of the terror I felt, for they not only hesitated to thrust me over, but even dragged me back several paces, and then began searching for their knives. I was satisfied with the turn affairs had taken, and therefore left off struggling, for I deemed stabbing to be a better death than an enforced leap from this Tarpeian rock. Seeing my utter exhaustion, one man withdrew from me whilst the other poised his weapon aloft. I muttered a prayer and closed my eyes; but as the thrust did not come, I opened them again just in time to see the knife flying into space, and its owner fall moaning on to the platform. I became so dizzy that everything was blurred for a few seconds, and when I recovered myself I found the summit of the pyramid cleared of everybody except the two Indians who had been rescued by my opportune arrival. It had taken them several minutes to cut through the cords which bound their wrists, and when they were at liberty their hands were so cramped that they were still powerless to assist me, and it was only at the critical moment that one of them saw my revolver, and used it effectually. They hurled the second priest over the edge whilst I was lying helpless on the stone pavement. Had I been capable of speaking or acting, I should have contented myself with making the scoundrel a prisoner.



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CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT.

THE object for which we had risked so much was now achieved, and the two intended victims stood before me full of gratitude for my having thought their lives worth saving. But as I collected a little strength, together with my scattered senses, I began to wonder how we should ever cut our way back to Amu's palace through the howling and ferocious mob which now nearly filled the square. I could do nothing to help Gillett, and he would be forced to take refuge here with me if he could succeed in fighting his way to the *teocalli*. Thus, though our Indians had been rescued for the time being, it seemed that we should have to stand a regular siege until Amu came to our succour; if he failed to do so, death was inevitable. My chief thought now was for the safety of the rest of our little party, and on looking over the edge, I saw with extreme satisfaction that they had at last succeeded in establishing themselves upon the lowest terrace.

Whilst I was surveying the animated scene below, one of the Indians touched me, and directed my attention to a tower at the north-west angle of the platform. The door being open, I caught a glimpse of its golden interior and the hideous image of the Serpent goddess, Tlilcoatl. It was the figure of a woman with countenance distorted into horrible lineaments of symbolical import; her left hand grasped a bundle of golden arrows, and her right appeared

as if caressing the head of a huge Anaconda, whose coils, formed entirely of emeralds and rubies, were wound around her body and left leg. Around her neck was a chain of gold and silver hearts, emblematical of the sacrifice in which she most delighted. Whilst I was shuddering at the diabolical aspect of Tlilcoatl, the Indians begged me to allow them to cast her from her shrine as a sort of revenge for the indignities they had been subjected to in her name. I was still hesitating to put this crowning insult on a people we had already terribly punished, when I remembered the deeds of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico, and resolved to imitate their proceedings if by so doing I could afford the least assistance to Gillett.

Once more I looked over the edge, and saw that the Indians were just holding their own, and did not seem inclined to mount any higher. I shouted my loudest, and fortunately succeeded in making my voice heard above the infernal din which floated upwards to meet the serene calm of the peaceful heavens. The doctor saw me, and gave a mighty shout of triumph at what seemed to him a resurrection, for, he afterwards told me, when he missed me from the lowest terrace, he gave me up for lost. By furious gesticulations I made him understand that he had better retreat to my position, and he immediately signified his acquiescence in the proposal.

I watched them evacuate the terrace and commence ascending the second flight, and the moment they did so, swarms of men and clouds of arrows flew after them, one of which found its billet in an Indian, who tottered and fell amongst his enemies. There were in all, seven flights of steps and six terraces to be traversed before the large level surface on the summit was reached. Gillett and his men had just toiled up to the fourth landing-place when the foe made a determined rush, and I was overwhelmed with anxiety as I saw it was not very energetically repelled. The men were evidently getting worn out with wounds and

fatigue, and I feared that another such assault would inevitably prove their destruction unless something was done to aid them.

With feverish haste I turned from watching the strife, and, accompanied by the Indians, ran to the shrine of Tlilcoatl, who frowned viciously upon us, as if conscious of the outrage we were going to perpetrate. By our united efforts we succeeded in casting the ponderous mass of metal from its pedestal; but as the doorway was narrow, we had to drag it through by main force, instead of being able to roll or lever it on to the platform. By this time my two allies had guessed the scheme I had in view, and they manifested their delight with many a guttural exclamation, and by putting an almost superhuman strength into their task. At last, we laboriously rolled the goddess to the very verge of the side which overlooked the third terrace. I gave a final glance, and saw the enemy crowding up in vast numbers and preparing to deliver another attack. Now was my time. With a mighty heave we ignominiously hurled her deityship down to wreak havoc and destruction upon her savage worshippers.

The result was awful! The huge mass of heavy metal, gaining force and velocity as it fell, came full upon the heads of the Tlilcoatl warriors, and cleared the terrace of all semblance of life, as well as rending a great chasm which effectually prevented any further pursuit. After it had performed this work of destruction, it bounded off on to the heads of the people below. Shrieks, groans, curses, and fearful threats of vengeance, filled the air as the vast crowd witnessed the unpardonable sacrilege of which we had been guilty. If the Tlilcoatl could have forgiven us for the wholesale massacre we had dealt out with our revolvers, they could never pardon the awful insult just offered to their religious feelings. But at that moment I did not stop to reflect upon the consequences of my act, and I returned a derisive shout to the threats and ravings

which reached me from the square. I was too excited to care a jot about anything except that my scheme had been the salvation of Gillett and his men. Even here I was a trifle premature, for our situation on the top of a pyramid, more than two hundred feet high, with a scanty supply of ammunition, and no food or water, and a howling, raging enemy cutting off our communications, could hardly be considered a safe one.

In a few more minutes the doctor and the remains of his gallant Indians landed on the summit of the *teocalli*, bespattered with blood and worn out with fatigue. Even the doctor's iron frame was exhausted, and he languidly held out his hand to clasp mine in a manner totally foreign to his energetic nature. As for the rest, they threw themselves down on the flagstones and lay there panting most painfully. Water was what they all wanted, for the tropical sun was now shining in all its torrid strength, and parching the worn-out men with thirst. But there was not a drop to be obtained, and unfortunately both Gillett and I had started off from the palace too hurriedly to remember our flasks of wine-and-water which we usually carried with us everywhere.

In a short time Gillett began to recover himself and look around upon his gallant little band, now utterly prostrate.

"Poor fellows!" he exclaimed. "They fought magnificently, and I could not wish to command a finer set of men. But," he continued with some of his old energy, "if we give ourselves over to laziness in this fashion, the enemy will steal up and capture the whole lot of us."

"There is not much fear of that," I replied. "My cannon-ball crashed through the third platform, and made a hole in it at least twelve feet wide. Until they repair it, they cannot possibly molest us."

"That was a happy thought of yours," said Gillett. "I think we must have been overpowered by another rush,

had it not been for your admirable diversion. By the bye, what missile was it you threw?"

"Nothing more nor less than the golden effigy of Tlilcoatl herself," I answered.

The doctor gave a prolonged whistle.

"Neither Amu, Cephren, nor anybody else can get us out of this scrape. Civil war, murder, rebellion, we could have atoned for by parting with most of our valuable meat-tins; but the hurling of the goddess on to the heads of her devoted worshippers was such a cynical sacrilege that the King will be forced to give us over to the Tlilcoatli. He would have forgiven us our attempt to deliver the Indians so wrongfully seized; but your action, useful as it was to me, has put us out of the pale of his protection."

"It strikes me that I have made Chaleo too hot to hold us," I exclaimed.

"I am afraid you are right," said the doctor with a sigh. "Who would have thought yesterday that another twenty-four hours would land us in this precious mess? Everything then seemed so bright and peaceful, that if the priest of Ra-teotl had prophesied the disaster, I should have laughed in his face."

"How are we going to get out of this precious mess?" I asked.

"I don't know," answered the doctor irritably. "But you may rely upon this, that if the insult to Tlilcoatl paralyzes Amu's desire to help us, we shall die here of hunger or thirst; and, judging by my present sensations, I imagine it will be the latter."

"How foolish it was to forget our flasks!" I muttered.

"Don't mention it; it is too tantalizing," exclaimed Gillett. "I am already so parched that my tongue feels twice its normal size, and I begin to find it tedious to pronounce my words. If thirst makes itself felt so soon in this tropical climate, we have a very slender chance

should Fate compel us to remain here more than four-and-twenty hours."

"We may escape at night if the Tlilcoatli have left one of the sides of the pyramid unguarded," I suggested.

"They are too good soldiers to be so careless," said the doctor. "Besides, where are the ropes coming from?"

"I noticed plenty coiled up in the shrine of the goddess," I replied. "They are probably kept to bind refractory victims to the altar."

"I cannot talk any more, my thirst is too intolerable," said Gillett. "I fancy I have all the symptoms of an acute attack coming on. Let me think what they are. Ah, the skin previously moist, suddenly becomes perfectly dry. Just my case. Then the eyes become deep red through congestion of the capillary blood-vessels. Are my eyes deeply red, Wrenforth?"

"No. They partake rather of a deeply green character."

"That's something to be thankful for," said the doctor, not noticing the sarcasm. "But the further symptoms are more serious. The mucous membrane of the throat and tongue becomes covered with a thick exudation resembling that of diphtheria. I need not ask you to look at my throat, because I am sure that I have not arrived at that stage yet. Then come spasms of the diaphragm, and—"

"Are the facial muscles likewise affected?" I interrupted most innocently. "Because if they are, I am afraid I must be going the same way as you."

I burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, and the doctor's eyes were opened.

"Don't laugh too much," he said in solemn tones, which nevertheless contained the slightest *soupçon* of derision. "Don't laugh too much, for it is an exhaustive process to the muscles, causing a waste of tissue which nature will but inadequately repair, owing to the want of a due supply of fluid nourishment."

"Your words conjure up delicious visions of Bass, and

of the wine our host is so partial to. What would I not give to have a few bottles up here!"

"It is hard to place your heart where your lips can never be," misquoted the doctor in dismal accents.

Whilst we were endeavouring to emulate Mark Tapley in cheerfulness, and buoy each other up with badinage, Chotil made his appearance with the list of casualties, and it was formidable enough to banish our forced merriment.

Five Indians were missing. Two were known to have been killed, but the other three we greatly feared had fallen alive into the enemy's hands. This reduced our number to fifteen, and of these nine were wounded; so that our fighting strength now consisted of six sound men besides Gillett and myself. On an emergency, perhaps four more, who were not very seriously hurt, might be able to offer some resistance, but the rest of the wounded were not even in a condition to crawl.

We had practically sacrificed five lives in order to save two, and in accomplishing this had placed ourselves in a desperate position. Not only had we aroused the bitter hostility of the most powerful section of the nation, but we had probably alienated the sympathy of the King and Amu by our rash action. Their argument would be that we ought to have carried our complaint to Cephren, who would have ordered the restitution of the prisoners, and the punishment of Ambouli and his priests. Our only answer to this was, that the Tlilcoatl guard in the palace would have prevented our obtaining an audience of "the Beloved of Ra-teotl," until his interference would have been useless, for by that time the captives would have been slaughtered.

Anyhow, from our point of view, we felt perfectly justified in the action we had taken, for it would serve to teach a barbarous race that they could not kidnap strangers with impunity, and that the white man would fight against tremendous odds sooner than allow the principles of injustice to be triumphant. Nevertheless, in the fight of civilization

against savagery, civilization had been reduced to miserable straits, and had to deplore the fact of half her strength being *hors de combat*.

By the time we had inspected the men and rendered the little assistance we could towards alleviating their pain, the sun had attained its zenith and the heat became overpowering. We tried to obtain shelter in the golden shrine of the dispossessed goddess, but the absorption of caloric by the metal rendered the interior so like a furnace that we were constrained to camp out in the open and cling closely to the shady side of the sacrificial altar, although it afforded next to no protection from the fierce solar rays.

As the hours wore on, our sufferings from thirst became unbearable; the conversation flagged and finally ceased altogether from an absolute want of power to make our parched lips frame the words. I can hardly remember how that awful afternoon was got through, for what with heat, fatigue, and torturing thirst, I sank into a thoroughly dazed condition from which I was only momentarily aroused by any movement on the part of my comrades. I recollect noticing with a dull kind of wonderment and admiration that Gillett still kept his head. He went amongst the men, saw that their rifles and revolvers were loaded, counted up the wofully small stock of ammunition, and occasionally sent a man to the edge of the platform to watch the movements of the enemy. The report was invariably the same—that the *teocalli* was surrounded by disciplined soldiers, who sent up a howl of execration and an impotent flight of arrows and stones directly they perceived the face of the scout. They evidently knew the strength of our position, defended as it was by thunder-and-lightning tubes, and were too wise to attempt to carry it by assault; they preferred to effect our capture by the slow but less dangerous process of starvation.

When these signs of activity aroused me to a sense of my miserable condition, my thoughts always reverted to Oosita, and filled me with unavailing grief and regret that I had gone away, perhaps for ever, without having told her of my deep and passionate love—a love so strong that it seemed the only thing now worth living for. Should I ever see her again, even if we succeeded in eluding the vigilance of our besiegers? I could only give a sad negative to my question, since a rapid flight from Chalco seemed the only chance left of escaping being cut to pieces, or mutilated on the altar of Tlilcoatl. I thought for an instant of begging her to forsake father, mother, and country, but the disgraceful selfishness of such a proceeding made me abandon it almost immediately it came into my mind. I do not think I had ever realized the intensity of my love until to-day. It came across me now like a revelation from another world, as if a spirit had disclosed to me the true meaning—the beautiful spirituality—of the union of two souls. Then it was that I knew fully the height and depth and breadth of my affection for Oosita; but the knowledge only came to me when the malice of man was preparing to separate us for ever! In those hours of silence, suffering, and anticipation of death, I went through agonies worse than death itself, but I came out of my mortal, despairing struggle, endowed with a calmness and resolution which had been denied to me before.

And poor Gillett—what must his thoughts have been? He was strangely quiet and self-possessed during this trying period. Yet he must have had greater griefs than afflicted me, for he had left parents and sisters behind him in Old England, to whom he was devotedly attached.

Almost unbroken silence reigned amongst us as the hours wore on, and the sun finally appeared as a huge blood-red disc on the western horizon; then with only a few minutes' warning it disappeared, and changed the broad daylight

into a deep darkness. The slight breeze which sprang up when the burning orb took its departure was most refreshing, and very shortly the men awoke from their stupor and began to converse in low whispers. From the fragments which were occasionally wafted to me, I gathered that their faith in the Machi had not been staggered by the recent events; it was as firm as ever, and his determined rescue of two of their number had added to the veneration in which he was already held.

"It is good to be a Machi," I exclaimed, after I had told Gillett what I had heard.

"It throws a vast amount of responsibility upon my shoulders," answered the doctor. "They no doubt expect me to supply them with their evening meal presently, and then lead them peaceably home to bed after the day's hard work. If I don't do something for them, my reputation will go down with a run."

"But what can be done?" I asked. "We can no more break out of this trap than fly."

"There will be no moon to-night," replied Gillett inconsequently.

"And what of that?" I inquired.

"It may help," he answered dreamily. Then in brisker accents he continued—"Darkness is as much the enemy's friend as ours. It may induce him to try an escalade, so the keenest of watches must be kept. Kindly go and explain this to Chotil."

When I returned from impressing upon our Indians the necessity of keeping a good look-out, I found the doctor deep in meditation. From his restless movements and frequent gesticulations, I felt sure that he was revolving some plan to extricate us from our perilous dilemma. I therefore did not disturb him, but sat down quietly and silently by his side.

It was now as dark as pitch, and the other brilliantly-lighted quarters of the city contrasted strangely with the

dense gloom of the square of Tlilcoatl. The neglect to illuminate it plainly showed the determination of the enemy to attack during the night. A bright glare would reveal the ascent of a body of men, and prevent our being taken by surprise ; whereas under cover of darkness they no doubt hoped to steal round the winding stairs, mend the shattered platform, and overwhelm us before we had time to be aware of their presence. But if they thought to catch us napping, they were very much mistaken, for we still had five rounds of ammunition per man left, and with that we could hold our own until daylight or until Amu relieved us. Then the horrible doubt recurred to my mind —would Amu dare to help us if the King had already declared us outlaws ? Ambouli was astute enough to lose no time in indicting us before Cephren and his Council, who would have no choice but to condemn us. Thus, deserted by every one, we should have to fight with the energy of despair in the desperate hope of cutting our way out of Chalco.

At last the doctor broke the gloomy silence.

"The Tlilcoatl have made up their minds to recapture the pyramid by assault. In all probability, they will adopt the usual Indian custom of commencing the attack about an hour before daybreak. If this conjecture be correct, I shall have plenty of time to put my plans into execution."

"What are your plans ?" I inquired impatiently.

"We have, I fear, only one chance of circumventing these rascals," he replied. "I have thought out your idea of descending by means of ropes ; I have calculated the chances of a desperate sortie ; I have taken into consideration the helplessness of our wounded, and the shortness of ammunition ; I have made my head ache with thinking, and have dismissed every plan in favour of this—that one of us should contrive to slip through the besieging force, and hasten to Amu to implore his aid and bring back a supply of ammunition. This is the only project my brain

can evolve, and it is, after all, a fearfully forlorn hope. What is your opinion?"

"That it is a sheer, absolute impossibility," I replied. "The attempt to descend the last staircase would infallibly involve the death of any one we sent, for, depend upon it, our foes have occupied the lower part of the pyramid in force."

"Have you any alternative scheme to propose, short of the rope business?" asked Gillett.

I thought for some moments, and then replied in the negative.

"Then my plan, dangerous as it is, must stand," said the doctor. "Something must be done, and quickly too, for delay means annihilation."

"Whom do you propose to send?" I inquired.

"Well, as my fertile brain originated the scheme, I intend to claim the honour of carrying it out myself."

"Nonsense," I interrupted. "I will never permit such foolhardiness."

"Now, Wrenforth, listen to me," said the doctor gravely. "Being thoroughly convinced that my plan contains the only means by which we can hope to escape, it is perfect waste of breath for you to call it foolhardy. Would it not be still more foolhardy for us to remain here as supinely as we have been for the last seven or eight hours? Think of to-morrow! Its blazing sun, even if we were unmolested by the enemy, would produce, with its fatal rays acting upon parched throats and empty stomachs, an outbreak of mania amongst our Indians. They are, heart and soul, our friends now, but the agony of to-morrow's thirst, coupled with the burning heat, will turn them into raging demons, who will attack all indiscriminately. With this fearful picture of what may happen if we cannot escape by dawn of day, you must acknowledge that my foolhardy plan contains a grain of wisdom. If I fail to bring help or fail to return, you must carefully watch for the first

symptoms of unruliness, and, when they appear, muster the men and lead them boldly to their doom amongst the Tilicoatl. It will be better for you to die at their head than fall a victim to the ferocity of madmen!"

"Your reasons are indeed cogent for wishing to communicate with Amu to-night," I replied, aghast at the new peril foreseen by the doctor's sagacity. "Nevertheless, I fail to see why you should undertake this forlorn hope. I claim my right, as leader of the expedition, to go in preference to you."

"You abdicated the position long ago," said Gillett impatiently. "I do not intend to have any discussion, for nobody else but myself shall start on so dangerous a mission. I have spoken, as Cephren says!"

"I have no intention of allowing myself to be put aside so easily," I answered quietly. "Who is more qualified to go than me? You have parents and relatives longing to see your dear old face again, whilst I am alone in the world. I should not be missed, but you would be mourned for ever."

"Come, Wrenforth, this is not fair," said the doctor, in a shaking voice. "I promised my mother before we left England that I would watch over you as a hen does her chickens, for your kindness to me won the dear old lady's heart. That promise is a sacred duty, which I intend to fulfil even if it leads me into the jaws of death."

"But, Gillett, she never contemplated such a Quixotic interpretation of her wishes."

"Don't argue with me any more," said the doctor sharply. "I know my duty, and as long as life lasts I will strive to do it, and will not be turned to the right or left by all the specious allurements of the world, the flesh, or the very devil himself!"

"Why should we not both go together?" I asked.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "A pretty kettle of fish we should find on our return. The Indians

would utterly lose their heads if bereft of a white man's guidance."

"But surely Chotil could—"

"I shall lose my temper if you continue to waste valuable time with your absurd objections," said the doctor angrily. "Help me to disguise myself in the robes of that dead priest yonder, and then I will make a start."

Notwithstanding his pretended anger I still implored him to give up his mad attempt, or at least to permit me to accompany him. To all I could urge he simply turned a deaf ear, or said that I had lived long enough with him to know that when his mind was made up, nothing could alter his resolution. Finding that he was thus obstinately bent upon undertaking the dangerous journey alone, I had at last to hold my peace and help him forward in his preparations.

The dead priest was stripped, and Gillett stepped into his clothes, making a very good representation of a Serpent-worshipper, except for the fairness of his skin, which, however, the darkness of the night would hide. Having accomplished the disguise, we next secured the services of Chotil and three Indians, and, armed with numerous coils of rope, proceeded cautiously down the stairway until we arrived at the broken-down terrace. Here our work was exceedingly difficult, for we did not dare to strike a light for fear of putting the enemy on the *qui vive*, and the task of bridging the chasm in the dark was an arduous one to amateurs. Chotil's eyes were sharper than ours in the night-time, and he was fortunate enough to discover among the *débris* a plank long enough to reach from one side to the other. This, fastened securely with ropes acting in such a way that we could use it as a drawbridge if necessary, was sufficient to allow one man to cross at a time.

At last the moment came for Gillett to start, and with a hearty hand-shake and a whispered "God bless you," he

went cautiously over the bridge and soon disappeared in the gloom. I stood still for some minutes listening to the faint sound of his footsteps, and, as they died away, began to accuse myself of cowardice in suffering him to go alone, and to feel indignant at allowing myself to be so easily persuaded that one would escape detection better than two. Perhaps I blamed myself too severely at the time, for the doctor's stubbornness and obstinacy are invincible when once his mind is made up!

Whilst employed in this self-castigation, I was painfully on the alert to catch the least sound which would indicate the discovery of Gillett. But the minutes gradually lengthened into half an hour without any signs of a *fracas*, and it was with an intense feeling of relief that I dared at last to hope that he had succeeded in passing undetected through the enemy's lines. All was quiet in the thick darkness, and I could discern nothing more than an occasional moving object, which I took to be one of the sentinels who were keeping their wary watch upon the trap into which we had fallen. Chotil, whose hearing was much more acute than mine, also helped to relieve my anxiety by confirming my opinion that Gillett was by this time safely out of the Tlilcoatl quarter.

"The Machi is a clever man, and he is sure to save us," he added confidently.

"Heaven grant it may be so," was my fervent response.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE POWER OF LOVE.

WITH a mind slightly more at ease than it had been for many hours, I turned to Chotil and told him that he and his three men had better remain by the bridge in readiness to replace the plank, should the doctor unexpectedly return. My intention was to make this a sort of advanced post from which we could harry the enemy, should he attempt to repair the huge rent in the terrace with the object of reaching our position on the summit of the *teocalli*. I gave my orders in a low tone, and we hugged the wall of the pyramid very closely, for fear of our outlines being rendered visible to those below. As we were now well within reach of their arrows and slings, any incautious exposure might convert our bodies into targets for practice —a thing to be devoutly avoided!

I was leaning wearily against the wall, impressing upon the Indians the necessity for extra vigilance in this exposed situation, and was just about to return to the summit to look after the other men, when a smothered exclamation from Chotil, followed by a slight noise, arrested my attention. I moved to where he had been standing, and, to my horror, found he had disappeared! For a moment, I imagined he had fallen over the low hand-rail which protected the stairway, on to the heads of the sentinels below, but whilst I was peering over into the solid darkness with extreme anxiety and perplexity, I heard his

voice echoing, as if it came from some deep vault or cavern.

"Master, master!" it said in a hoarse, reverberating whisper. "Here is a shelter from the heat of to-morrow's sun, if the Machi cannot come to us before."

Still uncertain as to his meaning, I groped my way about in the pitchy blackness, with hands spread carefully over the surface of the wall, until they came in contact with a breach in its continuity. Then I knew that Chotil must have been leaning against the unlatched door of a recess, and that the additional weight of his body had thrown it open and precipitated him into the interior. If this were so, we might be able to convert it into a fortress, whence we could defy the foe with greater impunity, and, above all, where we could give both shelter and cool air to our badly-wounded Indians.

Guided by Chotil's voice, I passed through an empty space into a deeper gloom than ever, and dimly perceived the chief's form standing beside me. I groped about, found the door, and shut it; then, without loss of time, ignited some of Bryant and May's never-failing matches, and by their light perceived that I was in a luxuriously-fitted apartment about twelve feet square, containing—O joy of joys!—a tempting repast, spread no doubt for the delectation of the priests after they had completed their brutal sacrifices. On the table were golden censers containing oil and cotton wicks ready for lighting, and Chotil and I quickly produced a splendid illumination. As soon as this was done, we both with one accord seized hold of a flagon of wine and drained it to the dregs. Only those who have ever suffered from thirst in the Tropics can appreciate the luxury of a deep draught of sparkling fluid! Moodiness, anxiety, and hopelessness gave immediate place to contentment, and a desire to study only the brighter aspect of things. Having satisfied our thirst, we took up some food, and whilst eating it, continued the inspection

of the room. At one end was a curtained archway leading to a smaller chamber which was used as the kitchen. As we entered it, we were astonished to see two miserable, cowering natives, shivering with fear at being discovered. They turned out to be the priest's cooks, who had been too frightened to make their escape during the time that Gillett was fighting on the stairs, and subsequently the terrific havoc wrought by the falling goddess effectually cut off their retreat. I relieved their abject misery by promising to spare their lives, and then made them useful as servants to my men.

I was delighted at our good fortune in securing food and an admirable fortress. The thick wooden door could be loopholed for musketry, while the stairway could be barricaded so that we could keep up a hot fire upon the soldiers below, with the smallest possible risk to ourselves. Altogether, our position had now vastly improved, and my only fear was that our ammunition might fail before succour reached us.

I carefully extinguished every light, then opened the door, and on emerging into the open air, found the other Indians in great wonderment at our sudden disappearance. My next step was to despatch Chotil to bear the good news to the rest, and bring them all down cautiously and silently. In a very short time the whole party was collected in the new station, and every man was satisfying his hunger and thirst with the delicacies provided for the priests of Tlilcoatl. Lights were burned only in the inner chamber, and their beams were hidden from the outer world by the thick Llanchama curtain across the archway, thus excluding any fear of our movements being detected, as well as enabling us to keep the outer door open.

With vigour renewed by a plentiful repast, the dull apathetic eyes of the men began to brighten, and even the wounded assumed a more cheerful expression. As for me, I speculated almost too hopefully on the future,

and pictured Gillett at Amu's palace, busily engaged in collecting together a force strong enough to raise the siege. In another hour or two we might expect him, for I had now worked myself into the belief that our host would not refuse to help us either by negotiation or fighting. That meat and wine were certainly the most powerful mental medicines I have ever taken! Their effect in raising me from the lowest depths of despair to an absurdly hopeful frame of mind was magical; and, as far as I could judge, they had a similar result on the Indians, but their habitual stoicism made it somewhat difficult to estimate the exact amount of exhilaration they experienced.

Wrapped thus in pleasant thoughts, I lighted one of the sacerdotal cigars which were provided in abundance, and reclined restfully on a soft, luxurious couch. Tired out as I was, excitement effectually banished sleep, and all I could do was to smoke the time away, and listen intently for the earliest signs of coming deliverance.

About an hour had elapsed in this fashion when the sentinel abruptly entered, and announced that the sound of ascending footsteps was distinctly audible on the stairway.

"How many do you judge are coming?" I asked.

"Only one, I think," answered the sentinel. "But the tread is so light that it is evidently a spy creeping up to reconnoitre."

I dropped my cigar and went out with him to listen, after ordering Chotil to get his men under arms. For a moment I could not detect the slightest sound, then the faintest of footfalls fell on my ears, and I dimly discerned a solitary figure coming slowly through the gloom. At first I thought it was Gillett returning empty-handed, and my spirits sank to zero, but as it approached nearer, I distinctly made out a native female dress. Whatever could a woman want in this haunt of danger? But it might be a spy disguised in female attire so as to attract less

suspicion. Whatever it was, I determined not to be taken unawares, so hastily cocking my revolver, awaited its arrival at the further side of the chasm. The person seemed to know of the existence of the break of continuity in the terrace, for she groped her way carefully, and finally came to a full stop a few paces away from the edge.

All this time we had kept ourselves concealed by crouching close against the wall, and, as yet, the spy was totally unaware of our proximity, for she stooped down and commenced feeling about for some material to span the gulf. Her search was unsuccessful, and she again raised herself to the erect posture, and assumed an attitude of great perplexity. Then she seemed as if she were wringing her hands in despair, until a happy thought appeared to appease her grief, and she retired backwards several paces. All at once it flashed across me that this woman was about to attempt to leap over the yawning gulf! It was more than I could stand, to see a fellow-creature deliberately try a jump, where the least slip was bound to result in a hideous catastrophe. In hot blood or in fair fight, I might have been the first to hurl the wretched creature into the deep abyss, but it was a very different thing to witness with *sang-froid*, an attempt which had every chance of terminating in fatal consequences. I started from beneath the shadow of the wall and called out in tones loud enough for her to hear. The sound of my voice arrested her just as she began to run, and she gave utterance to an exclamation of pleasure which went through me with a strange thrill!

Surely the recent events had unhinged my mind and rendered me delirious! Yet the soft, delicious accents of Oosita seemed to my distraught brain to have been echoed by that mysterious being yonder—whether male or female, I knew not. Could imagination torture me so fearfully by conjuring up such a cruel deception? Yet deception it must be, for how could this dainty girl have passed through



All at once it flashed across me that this woman was about to attempt to leap over the yawning gulf!—*p. 292.*

a horde of bloodthirsty barbarians alone and unharmed? But though reason told me that this could not possibly be my sweet Oosita, yet an inward longing to see the person who could recall her image to my mind, impelled me to let down the plank which formed the improvised bridge, and spring over it in a wild tumult of anxiety. A few steps brought me to the hesitating form, and as I reached it, not even the dense gloom could conceal from me the well-known beauties of that graceful figure. It was Oosita standing there alone and unprotected! I called her name with a low, glad cry, and the next instant clasped her in my arms, where she laid and sobbed as if her heart would break. Some few minutes were occupied in soothing her, and then I tenderly conducted her over the bridge to the interior of the fortress, which I speedily cleared of its occupants.

Though full of joy at seeing her once again, yet I was terribly anxious to ascertain the reasons which had prompted her to take so extraordinary a step—a step fraught with peril to one so delicate and refined. When my glad emotions had somewhat subsided, I lost no time in asking her the cause of her undertaking so dangerous an expedition.

"I incur no danger," she answered, "for I am protected by the pass of the lord Ambouli."

As she spoke, I noticed the sweet look of happiness fade from her face and a troubled expression replace it.

"I cannot bear to see your lovely eyes overflowing with unhappiness!" I exclaimed, with an infinite tenderness that made her beam again with pleasure. But the gladness almost immediately died out and a hopeless misery returned.

"Cannot the knowledge of my love make you happy?" I asked. "Can you still doubt my affection? It has spoken from my eyes to your heart every day for many weeks, and now, with my arms around you and your dear head resting against me, I tell you I love as never woman was loved before."

She nestled closer to me for answer, and then burst into such a passionate paroxysm of weeping, that its vehemence and persistence alarmed me. By dint of many caresses and tender words I at last quieted her agitation, and got her to tell me the meaning of her being here instead of at home in her father's palace. Her explanation proved that I had gained the love of an angel, for it unfolded all the amiability, affection, and generous self-sacrifice, of which only the noblest woman is capable.

"The news of the capture of your Indians," she said, "reached me at the same time that I heard of your having started to rescue them. Hearing that you had dispatched a messenger to my father, I trusted that all would come right without any bloodshed, and therefore felt no very great uneasiness. Less than an hour after your departure, the din of battle aroused us to a sense of your danger, for we knew that your handful of men would be swallowed up by Ambouli's legions. As the time went on, I suffered intense agony on your account, for I pictured to myself your dead body, slain by a cruel Tlilcoatl arrow! My anguish at last became so extreme, that I burst into tears, and begged my mother to order our soldiers to arm and march to your rescue. She found out then that I loved you, and tenderly gave me her blessing, at the same time beseeching me to have a little more patience, for the messenger was now overdue from my father. Whilst impatiently awaiting for the lord Amu's authority to act, a despatch arrived from the King ordering us to abstain from any hostile attack on the Tlilcoatl, and informing us that if any of the strangers survived, they would be banished from the kingdom as disturbers of the peace. This peremptory order greatly increased my misery, and, as the messenger still unaccountably loitered on the road, another one was sent off with urgent instructions. Intelligence now began to come in of your brave deeds. We were informed of your desperate attack and the capture of

the *teocalli*; but when I heard that you were separated from your companions, and kept a whole phalanx at bay, unaided, my anxious heart swelled with delight at your heroism, and my love for you passed into adoration! The hours wore on, and as neither of the messengers had returned, we began to fear some treachery, so promptly sent off two together, whilst my mother issued directions for the whole tribe to arm itself, and be prepared for action at any minute. Over and over again, deputations came to beg us to allow the Deesmunxiatl to go to your rescue, but we did not dare to commence an internecine strife without a word from the lord Amu. It was a deplorable condition for us to be in, and I almost began to despair when I received intelligence that your position was fast getting perilous—that though you had won the temple and hurled the goddess from her shrine, yet this had only been accomplished with the loss of more than half your force, whilst the other half was unfit for further fighting on account of numerous wounds. The sun went down without our receiving any communication from the lord Amu, and without any of the messengers having returned. My mother became greatly alarmed, and at last sent a phalanx of soldiers in search of him. I do not know yet whether he has arrived home. As the darkness fell, I wept at the thought of your being hemmed in and suffering from cruel hunger and thirst without any prospect of release, and then, half-frenzied with grief, resolved to take a step which seemed the only one that would save your life. Without telling any one of my desperate plan, I went to the atrium and ordered an escort to be in readiness to attend me. Having hastily robed myself, I departed very quietly and presented myself at the palace of the lord Ambouli."

"Good heavens!" I interrupted. "Whatever induced my gentle dove to put her head into that tiger's den?"

"Listen!" she answered sorrowfully. "You will soon

know. His astonishment must have been great at hearing that a daughter of the lord Amu desired an audience, for he was almost speechless as he recognized me. But he quickly recovered his presence of mind, received me with excessive politeness, and demanded to know in what way he could serve me. Then I began to plead earnestly for your life. I promised that you should at once leave Atlicaliguian territory if he would only permit you to come forth unharmed. As he listened to my entreaties, his politeness forsook him and he frowned with savage anger. ‘Your kinsman has made a river of blood in our quarter,’ he said roughly. ‘His deeds have caused a widespread mourning throughout our habitations. This might have been forgiven; but he has thrown Tlilcoatl from her altar, and for this act he must die.’ Nothing I could urge could shake his diabolical resolution to sacrifice you if you fell alive into his hands, and seeing that all further pleading would be useless, I was at last forced to offer him a bribe which I felt sure he would not refuse.”

Here the poor girl broke down utterly, and it was some time before she could resume her story.

“Always remember,” she continued in a sweet, low voice, “that what I have done has been done out of my deep love for you, and entirely to save a life which was otherwise inevitably doomed.”

“And what was the bribe?” I asked, totally unprepared for the answer I got.

“That the moment you were clear of Atlicaliguian soil with all your property, I would marry him.”

“Good God!” I exclaimed, starting up so violently that Oosita recoiled terrified. “*You* to marry that bloodthirsty barbarian! You to sacrifice your future happiness in order that I may live my wretched life a little longer! Do you think that I would consent to exist under such conditions, that I would care to be in this world without your constant presence? I will consign neither you nor myself to the

misery of knowing that we live, yet can never be united. I would rather die a hundred times than see you tied to a brutal savage, and I would plunge my sword into your heart to save you from such awful degradation."

"Life is dear to us all," she urged. "Do not reject it, for you are powerless to escape ; and in the coming years I shall not be so miserable, for I shall always have the sweet consciousness that my great love has been of service to you."

She came closer to me and timidly placed her hand in mine, whilst her eyes were fixed on me with a passionately imploring look. I shivered with an ecstasy of joy at the nobility of a character which would consign itself to endless misery, in order that a loved one might live. A deep reverence now mingled itself with my soul-felt love.

"My poor understanding could never fathom the wealth of love that prompts your self-sacrifice," I said, in a voice unsteady with emotion. "The holiness, purity, and goodness of your sweet nature stand revealed by your generous actions, and I thank God that He has permitted me to live long enough to learn that His earth is not wholly vile, but contains some noble beings whose lives approach nearly to the perfection of the heavens."

Oosita covered her face with her hands and was silent. Presently she raised her mournful eyes to mine, and fixed upon me a loving, sorrowful, and despairing look.

"You make too much of my feeble efforts on your behalf," she said. "Who would not deem life well lost if the sacrifice saved the loved one?"

"Truly, love glorifies all things," I replied. "It can make the feeble strong, and convert the saint into a willing martyr ! But, darling, my affection has been raised to lofty heights by the cheerfulness with which you would undergo misery for my sake, and I therefore am ready to lose all things, life itself, to retain your love and save you the least pain."

"Do not make me falter in my resolve," she implored.

"The lord Ambouli allowed me to come to you and offer you your life and freedom upon these terms. What answer am I to take back ? "

"Let him go to the—the place prepared for him !" I exclaimed angrily. "I refuse to purchase my life or liberty by acceding to any such disgraceful conditions ! Does he think me as vile as himself, to imagine that I would listen for a moment to such stipulations ? He does not mention Gillett and my brave followers in his proposed treaty. Does he calculate upon my hugging life so dearly, that I would buy my safety by sacrificing these gallant companions ? Do not urge me any more. If I cannot live a life of honour, I will seek through death a happier country where the wicked cease from troubling, and where a man's soul cannot be tortured by degrading propositions from the vilest of the vile."

"Do grant me the consolation of feeling that you have acceded to the first boon I have ever asked of you," she pleaded tearfully. "Let me take back a more favourable answer."

"Tell him this then," I replied. "That sooner than surrender you to his charge, I would make a votive offering of him and his whole tribe—men, women, and children—to his Serpent goddess. The bare idea of losing you makes me forget the character you once gave me for humanity, and transforms me into almost as great a fiend as Ambouli."

"Must I go back and tell him this ?" she asked with deep anxiety in her voice.

"You are not going back to the tiger's den," I declared emphatically.

"My word is passed to return under any circumstances."

"You are not going to leave me," I replied, with stern decision.

"But a promise is too sacred to be broken."

"All is fair in love and war, my darling princess," I

exclaimed, caressing her. "As we have come together through the kindness of the lord of the Tlilcoatli, I intend to improve upon his exhibition of good-will by detaining you here until I can place you in safety. In fact, I will surrender you to nobody else but your parents."

I had a great deal of difficulty in overcoming her honourable scruples as to the rectitude of breaking her pledge, but I pointed out than an oath extorted under the influence of fear was not binding, and that only a ruffian would have taken so mean an advantage of a girl's distress. I also declared my conviction that Ambouli would detain her, if I were weak enough to allow her to go back to his palace, and then her father would curse me as being the author of his daughter's destruction. I was so determined, that, had I not been able to convince her by argument, I should have kept her by force. Fortunately, she trusted to my superior judgment, and stayed.

I was well aware that Ambouli was desperately enamoured of Oosita. But when a semi-savage cannot get his own way by fair means he generally will by foul, and it was this thought which made me so resolute to keep her under the protection of our rifles. I wondered that a man of Ambouli's cunning had permitted her to come to me at all, but I accounted for it satisfactorily as I called to mind his craftiness. His idea, no doubt, was to lull me into a sense of security by granting a safe-conduct, and when I emerged from the *teocalli* to take me prisoner and sacrifice me to the goddess I had so fearfully outraged. I explained this to Oosita, and, when she saw that I had no faith in the man's most solemn assurances, she adopted my view of the case and ceased to lament over a broken promise.

The final settlement of this vexed question brought us back to supreme happiness. As I sat with Oosita clasped in my arms and listened to her ardent confession of love, poured from her maiden heart in words of exquisite sweetness, I drove away all fearsome idea of perils yet to be

overcome, and lived only in the delicious present. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." What cared I for the calamities the morrow might have in store? An hour of this perfection of delight would be cheaply purchased with centuries of future suffering.

The appearance of my Indian sentinel rudely awoke me from the Elysium of love to the harsh realities of life. He brought intelligence that the Tlilcoatl quarter, previously wrapped in sombre darkness, was now being brilliantly illuminated, and also the welcome news that the sounds of a conflict were distinctly audible! Gillett had evidently been successful, and Amu was advancing to release us from our uncomfortable position. I went out on to the terrace, and saw that the square was a blaze of light. Presently an officer accompanied by a few soldiers came with haste towards the pyramid, and a few minutes later the phalanx which had been guarding us moved off under his direction. Immediately they gained the further side of the square the lamps were extinguished, and darkness again enveloped everything.

I could not understand the meaning of these proceedings. The rapid illumination and its sudden extinction, the distant sounds of battle, and the withdrawal from the *teocalli* of all but a few sentinels, probably portended that the Tlileoatli were being hard pressed; but, on the other hand, it might be a *ruse* to lure us away from our stronghold, and woe betide us should we be so foolish as to walk into the snare. If the discordant shouts and clash of arms, which raged only a short distance off, really betokened that Amu had come to the rescue, my best plan most certainly was to dash out of the poorly-guarded pyramid, and create a diversion by suddenly falling upon Ambouli's flank or rear. But I so dreaded an ambuscade that I could not make up my mind to take the wounded and, above all, Oosita from our present safe shelter. Whilst I was still in a state of indecision, Chotil cut the Gordian knot for me

by volunteering to reconnoitre from the lowest steps of the stairway. When I gave permission he carefully arranged the coils of his lasso, and with stealthy movement crept off on his dark journey.

I returned to Oosita and told her the position of affairs, adding for her comfort that I thought the Tlilcoatli were being beaten, as they had practically raised the siege of the pyramid. The news relieved her greatly, although her content was somewhat marred by anxiety for her father, but loving caresses soon removed the gravity from her face, and it gradually became wreathed in smiles of innocent happiness.

Some guttural exclamations from the Indians on guard outside, forced me to leave my companion in order to ascertain their cause, and I was amazed to see that Chotil had already returned, and was half carrying, half dragging a prisoner, who seemed to be nearly insensible from strangulation, for the chief's lasso was drawn tightly round the wretched man's neck.

"He will be able to give us information," said Chotil, as he busied himself with removing the cord. "I slipped upon him unawares, as he was turning round to face me. He was very quick though, for his battle-axe was poised just as I throttled him."

This was a most important capture, so I lost no time in reviving the man. When he was sufficiently recovered, I questioned him, but his obstinacy in refusing to give me any clue as to what was going on made me lose my temper, whilst Chotil ground his teeth with rage. Threats were useless, and it was only when I promised that his life should be spared that his tongue was loosened. I now found out that Ambouli had devised as pretty a scheme as possible, not only for seizing and sacrificing the foreigners in Chalco, but for deposing Cephren and proclaiming himself head of the confederacy! In furtherance of his plans, Amu had been got out of the way so as to prevent the

interference of his clan whilst the foreigners were being massacred. Every messenger sent to Amu was made prisoner when only a mile or two on the road, hence it was not until his return home late in the evening that the lord of the Diamond Cross first heard an account of these nefarious proceedings. His anger must have been terrific when he discovered how Ambouli had befooled him, for without entering the palace he mustered his men and burst into the Tilcoatl quarter like a bombshell, where he was still fighting. Ambouli, in his anxiety to crush the Dees-munxiatli at one blow, had ordered every available man to help him, and as so many soldiers were on duty at the royal palace, he was obliged to withdraw the phalanx which was besieging us, hoping that in our ignorance of the effort being made for our relief, we should remain where we were.

When I had finished my interrogations and reiterated my promise that the man's life should be spared, I turned away to convey the glad tidings to Oosita. Just as I was about to pass through the doorway, a slight sound like a struggle induced me to turn my head. I was thoroughly sickened as I saw that the unfortunate prisoner had been forced to his knees, whilst Chotil stood over him holding his long hair in one hand, the other grasping a keen-bladed knife, with which he had just commenced the operation of scalping! With a bound I was on to the chief, and the next instant wrenched the weapon from him, exclaiming as I did so—

"I will have none of your barbarous practices whilst you are under my orders."

The chief glared at me with a mutinous look, which seemed to express a desire to have my scalp as well as the prisoner's; but as a quarrel with him at the present juncture might lead to disastrous consequences, I restrained a very strong wish to knock him down, and determined on the use of discretion as being safer than valour. I invoked the all-powerful name of Gillett, and told Chotil that if any

scalps were taken during this expedition the Machi would be unable to protect him who did it. The ascendancy the doctor had acquired over the "untutored savage" was marvellous; the mere idea of his withdrawing his protecting influence brought Chotil to his senses, and induced him to give up his bloodthirsty design and return to his allegiance.

The prisoner I had saved from mutilation thoroughly comprehended the nature of my interference, and testified his gratitude by crawling to my feet and acknowledging himself my devoted slave. His thanks were so earnest that I pitied the poor fellow, and promised to set him free the moment we arrived at Amu's palace.

I now rapidly formed my plan of action. It was to hasten with Oosita to our own quarters, and having deposited the wounded, to go with what recruits I could muster to the assistance of Amu. The prisoner, thoroughly overcome by my unexpected kindness, became communicative, and advised me to avoid the east road where the fighting was going on, but to take the south road into the grand square, from whence I could reach the Deesmunxiatl quarter unmolested. As we had five wounded men to convey with us, I pressed the three prisoners into the service to help to carry the improvised litters of Llanchama curtains, and when this had been attended to, there remained only five of us free to fight. My orders were to use the spear or knife, for these would do their work silently, and not raise an alarm as the report of a gun undoubtedly would.

When all was ready I brought Oosita out, and then we silently commenced our downward movement. When we arrived at the lowest terrace a halt was called, and leaving my sweet princess with the wounded, I descended with the four combatants to clear the way. One drowsy sentinel was discovered, and Chotil speedily lassoed him and completed the tragedy with his knife. Whilst this was going on I walked to the further angle of the pyramid, pounced upon another foe, and gagged and bound him securely.

These two seemed literally the only guards left by Ambouli to watch our movements, for I reconnoitred all round the *teocalli* without coming across another living soul.

The road being thus cleared I had the sick brought down, and then, with Oosita by my side, turned my back on the pyramid of Tlilcoatl for ever. We marched rapidly at right angles to the road which was the scene of the conflict between Amu and Ambouli, and as its din and tumult fell on my ears, I hastened our pace so as to place Oosita in the security of her father's palace. As we passed through its closely-guarded portals, amidst the acclamations of the Deesmunxiatl soldiers, into the atrium, we were met by the ladies Amu and Eruna, whose anxiety speedily turned to happiness as the mother took her missing daughter to her arms.

Having attended to the wounded, I immediately started off with my little band of Indians, and half a dozen volunteers who had learned to handle a rifle, to Amu's assistance. As we neared the field of battle I was astonished at the silence which prevailed, and on getting closer I saw that a suspension of hostilities had taken place, and that the leaders were discussing the terms of a truce. My appearance was the signal for a discordant yell from the Tlilcoatli, which I acknowledged by satirically raising my helmet!

Amu greeted me cordially, and explained that when Ambouli was made acquainted with our escape he had proposed peace, upon the ground that the object of the Deesmunxiatl attack had been attained. My host agreed to a truce only, stating that he had yet to receive satisfaction for the affront put upon him by the waylaying and detention of his messengers. Ambouli consented to discuss the affair more fully the next morning, and then the opposing forces withdrew from their dangerous proximity to each other.

So occupied was I in detailing to Amu all the events of the day, that we had entered the palace and dismissed the soldiers before a thought of Gillett crossed my mind. For

the first time I thought it strange that I had not seen him among the group of officers who surrounded Amu, and therefore made inquiries for him. No one had seen him! He had never reached the palace, and consequently must be a prisoner in the hands of the Tlilcoatli. My blood curdled with horror at such an awful idea, for I knew the enemy too well to hope that they would spare him. Full of anguish and fearful anxiety, I rushed to Amu to inform him of my terrible surmise, and to request his aid in devising some method of deliverance.

CHAPTER XX.

PREPARED FOR SACRIFICE!

ON entering the hall, my eyes immediately lighted upon Amu in the midst of a group consisting of his wife, daughters, and principal officers, all of whom appeared in a state of great agitation. My anxiety on Gillett's account was, however, so extreme that I put aside any hesitation I felt at breaking in upon this solemn deliberation, and advanced to deliver my dismal intelligence, which my host received without exhibiting much surprise.

"I knew that he had fallen into the hands of the Tlilcoatli directly you pointed out his absence," said Amu.

"What can be done to rescue him?" I asked.

"We were discussing that question when you arrived," answered Amu. "In fact, I was propounding a plan which meets with more opposition than necessary."

"Let me hear it," I exclaimed, too anxious to note Oosita's tearful face at the time.

"You at least will be able to enter into my feelings," answered Amu. "You will not seek to prevent my carrying out the scheme. If I do not attempt it my self-respect will have gone for ever, and all men will hold me in contempt."

"The lord Amu's character stands too high to suffer anything from detraction," I replied.

"Yet it will suffer in my estimation if I am dissuaded from doing what I consider right. Not only am I bound

to your brother by ties of kinship, but by another bond, whose obligation is equally sacred. It is that of hospitality. A stranger in a strange city, he unreservedly threw himself upon my protection, and how have I requited his trust? Behold, he is a prisoner to a lord of Chalco and threatened with death! Am I to rest supine under this great disgrace, and let people say that Amu cares neither for honour nor the sacred duties of hospitality?"

"No one can speak the truth and say that," I answered.

"Thanks, my lord," replied Amu. "I knew that you would read me aright. Upon me will rest eternal disgrace if I cannot save my guest, and I can only see one way to effect it. The sacrifice of Oosita to the lord Ambouli is forbidden me; Eruna he would not accept, for he loves her sister; therefore I am induced to offer myself in exchange for your brother."

"Have you sufficiently counted the cost of such a surrender?" I asked, in amazement that he should deem his duty to a guest paramount to all other interests. "Have you pictured to yourself the Christian tribe of the Dees-munxiatli, and the gentle and polished worshippers of Ra, bowing their heads beneath the yoke of the savage and bloodthirsty Serpent? In the name of religion and for the sake of your superb civilization, I adjure you not to do this thing. You are the representative of law, order, and humanity, which are more precious to your nation than the lives of one or two white men. Ambouli will keep no faith with your tribe even if you yield yourself, hence let me beg you to allow me to attempt alone my friend's liberation."

"I cannot permit it," answered Amu resolutely. "My self-reproach would be doubled if you were to fail in the rescue and fall into the hands of the Serpent chief!"

"Know you not that Ambouli is threatening the King?" I asked. "Is this a time, therefore, to make his rebellion the easier by placing yourself—a formidable adversary—in

his power? Calamity threatens not only your tribe but the nation, and urgently demands the dismissal of all personal considerations."

" Except those of honour," said Amu with a sad smile.

" There can be no exceptions in such a case as this," I replied, somewhat annoyed at his obstinacy. " Your captivity will paralyze the Deesmunxiatli, who will be forced to stand by and see the royal tribe destroyed and the King deposed, as the only condition upon which your life will be spared. If you are desirous of seeing Christianity supplanted by devil-worship, and refinement by savagery, your plan will help it materially."

Oosita here added her soft tones of entreaty to mine, and, as Amu fixed his eyes lovingly upon her, the resolute look in his face became less determined. She was quick to perceive this change, and acknowledged my attempt at dissuasion by giving me a glance full of joy and inexpressible tenderness.

Amu intercepted the look, and his features immediately assumed an air of astonishment and perplexity. I saw at once that his suspicions were aroused, and should have told him of our mutual love then and there had we been alone. But the crowd prevented any interchange of confidence, and fate decreed that he should remain in ignorance for ever! I certainly made up my mind to confess to him at the first convenient opportunity, but when it came, a sudden fear that he would reject my suit and deny me the comfort of Oosita's presence effectually sealed my lips.

After Amu's short, sharp glance had rested upon me and his daughter, he turned on his heel abruptly, beckoned two of his principal counsellors to him, and commenced a whispered consultation at the further end of the hall. In a few minutes he returned to where I was standing with Oosita, and with another perplexed glance at us began to speak.

" My counsellors are of the same opinion as you, Lord

Wrenforth. In face of such strenuous opposition, and taking into consideration the fact that Ambouli is meditating civil war, I am forced for the sake of the common good to sacrifice my honour, and give up my intention of yielding myself as a hostage for your brother."

An air of ill-concealed bitterness pervaded his speech, which showed how galling it was to this proud, rigidly upright man to have to submit to the lowering of his dignity, even for the sake of a nation's welfare and peace.

"There is wisdom in a multiplicity of counsellors," I replied, "and I am glad that your project is abandoned in deference to their advice. It now only remains for me to obtain information as to where my brother is likely to be incarcerated, and then to set forth to release him. Chotil and I will be able to break through any bolts and bars."

"Stay!" exclaimed Amu. "If I have given up the idea of surrendering myself to Ambouli, I am still determined to do all I can towards effecting the release of your friend, and intend therefore to accompany you. I shall be invaluable as a guide through the intricacies of the Tlilcoatl quarter, whereas your Indian servant will prove more a hindrance than a help. Leave him behind and take me instead."

The task of rescuing Gillett was a desperate one, for I should have to pass through a hostile population thirsting for my blood, until I discovered his prison. The chances were a hundred to one against success, for I feared I should be recognized very quickly. Of course a large armed party was out of the question, as only enhancing the certainty of detection. Even if I managed to find his place of confinement, I ran every risk of being caught whilst endeavouring to obtain access to him. I pointed out these dangers to Amu, but in spite of argument and expostulation, he adhered to his resolution, and I was at last reluctantly forced to give in.

When Oosita heard that her father and myself were

about to set forth on this hazardous expedition alone, her grief broke through all restraint, and she threw herself into Amu's arms and sobbed bitterly. It was pleasant to see how the stern man could unbend at the sight of distress, and how tenderly he soothed her sorrow and assuaged her agony of mind. As for me, I was distracted at the idea of not being able to help in calming her fears, and nothing but an Englishman's dread of creating a scene prevented my snatching her from her father's arms, and letting her weep out her tears on my breast. But the thought of Gillett and of what might even now be taking place, forced me to put selfish love on one side and urge on Amu the necessity for despatch. He handed the half-fainting Oosita to her mother, said a tender farewell, and announced himself ready. As I passed the ladies I made my adieux, exchanged a swift, loving glance with my sweet princess, and then went quickly through the doorway into the dark night air, which fortunately concealed my agitation from my companion.

As we slipped quietly through the gardens, Amu explained his plan of action. It was to leave the city by the southern gate, descend the zigzag road to the river, and proceed thence by boat to the western entrance which gave access to the Tlilcoatl quarter. As Amu's soldiers were the guardians for the month of all four gates of the city, we did not anticipate any difficulty in gaining admittance to the enemy's district; it was only on nearing Ambouli's palace that our real troubles would begin.

All went well with us. We took our boat journey without any mishap, and passed into the city again without having met any of our foes. As Amu entered the western gate he informed the officer on duty of the object which brought him there, and also told him of the ambitious designs of the Tlilcoatl to seize the reins of government; he warned him to be vigilant against surprise, and gave him instructions to retreat by boat to the Deesmunxiatl

quarter should he be attacked by overwhelming odds. With a parting injunction to hold his post if possible until our return, we left him and proceeded northward along the Road of the Rampart until we arrived at the avenue leading direct to the Serpent chief's palace, where we had every reason to suspect that Gillett was confined. We passed several people on our way, but as Amu had attired himself in the dress of a civilian, and I had toned my face down to a coppery hue, we were fairly safe from detection.

We had to make nearly half the circuit of the city before we arrived at the avenue which bifurcated at the back of the grounds enclosing Ambouli's palace. After a careful glance round to make sure that no interlopers were watching our proceedings, we scaled the palisades, and in another minute were cautiously stealing through the winding paths and shrubberies towards the right wing of the building, where the prisoners' dungeons were situated.

I may as well observe here, if I have not previously done so, that the execution of criminals condemned by the proper tribunals devolved upon the Tlilcoatli. The royal tribe was too proud to soil its hands with such repellent work ; and the Deesmunxiatl were too humane, too averse to shedding blood, to have anything to do with the task of ridding the world of scoundrels. But when the Serpent-worshippers received an asylum at Chalco, their brutalizing rites, far from being an impediment, made it all the easier to shift the degrading office of public executioners upon them ; and as their priests were always eager for human victims, it became customary to hand over to them all those on whom the law had passed sentence of capital punishment. Amu, therefore, well knew his way to the dismal abode where many a poor wretch had awaited with awful fear, or calm stoicism, the cruel fate which would terminate his life on the sacrificial stone of Tlilcoatli.

At a little distance through the trees I saw the palace

in a brilliant blaze of light, which betokened that neither Ambouli nor his officers were sleeping, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. No doubt the subjugation of the Christian tribe and the seizure of Cephren was being discussed within those walls, but the savages would find that they had undertaken a more difficult task than they imagined, for Amu had already acted on my information by warning the royal tribe of the impending danger. As we advanced through the grounds, our movements had hitherto been concealed by the thick shrubs and the deep shadows thrown by the numerous trees ; but we had now arrived on the edge of a broad zone of illumination which we should be forced to traverse to reach the prison, and in which our figures would be plainly visible to an observant foe. Having come so far with an all-important object in view, any hesitation was out of the question, hence, without the least appearance of hurry, we moved calmly across the shining sward, trusting that the armed warriors we saw flitting about might mistake us for persons who had business at the palace. By sheer good luck, we got across the illuminated space into the shadow cast by the palace without being addressed by any of the people we were compelled to pass, and then Amu rapidly led the way to the right-hand angle of the building which he pointed out as containing the dungeons.

I was wondering to myself how Gillett's release was to be effected now that we had got to the outside of his prison, and was viewing with dismay the terrible strength of the walls which guarded him, when Amu turned a corner of the building, and, before I could follow him, the sound of voices told me that he was discovered. Impelled by nature's first law—that of self-preservation—I shrunk close into the deep gloom of a projecting buttress, and from my hiding-place heard enough to convince me that my gallant companion was not only discovered but recognized !

"Give the sign, or state your business," said the sentinel sharply, as the rattle of his spear on some portion of his armour informed me that he had brought the weapon to the charge.

"I know not the sign," replied Amu. "I was but wandering about aimlessly, so will retire from a part so carefully guarded."

Then there was a movement as if he were walking away, when a second sentinel's voice took up the conversation.

"Stay ! Thy voice is familiar to me, and I would desire to see thy countenance."

A few seconds of torturing silence followed this unpleasant request, and then the words came forth which ruined my hope that Amu might escape.

"The lord of the Diamond Cross has mistaken the way to the audience-chamber of the lord of the Ruby Serpent. Permit us to escort you thither as befits your high rank."

"It is too late to interview him to-night," began Amu.

"The lord Ambouli will be accessible throughout the night, so deign to follow us," came the reply, couched in such tones as to amount to a command.

Amu haughtily signified his assent, and, directly I heard their feet crunching the quartz pathway, I peered round the angle just in time to see him and the two sentinels disappear through the door. This unfortunate *contretemps* seemed likely to leave me a clearer field, if the Tlilcoatl guards intended to take their prisoner into Ambouli's presence ; but Amu's capture might mean his death, and yet I had been utterly supine whilst he was parleying ! Struck by this thought, I rushed from my place of concealment with the intention of using the knife on his captors ; but I was just an instant too late, for as I entered the corridor I saw a door quite close to me being shut, and heard the bolts being shot into their places. With a feeling of rage I tried to force open the barrier, but my

strength was wasted against the massive timber, and, after several ineffectual attempts, I desisted. However, notwithstanding my tardiness in going to Amu's help, I had gained one point, for I had obtained access to the interior of the palace without the Tlilcoatl being any the wiser. As I turned away from the door I had so vainly battered, I found that I was in a corridor about twenty feet long, which, besides that through which Amu had passed, contained two other exits—one in the middle and the other at the further end. I went cautiously towards the central door, and gathered from the sound of voices, mixed with the sonorous breathing of sleepers, that this was the guard-room. Thence I crept silently towards the further portal, which was ajar. Feeling that it was my duty to explore the regions beyond, in the vague hope of unearthing the doctor's cell, I pushed it open and passed through into a passage which, turning abruptly at right angles, led me to the top of a flight of stone steps. I descended these, went through another door, and found myself in a large subterranean chamber, brilliantly lighted and filled with a number of huge golden cages. I imagined I had wandered into the menagerie of the establishment, and my spirits fell at the idea of having to seek elsewhere for the poor doctor, and my hopes became very forlorn at the prospect of a long and dangerous search in this labyrinthine palace. I glanced around curiously, expecting to see the glaring eyes of a panther or the cruel claws of a jaguar, but my vision was rewarded with a very different sight. Six of the cages were tenanted by feathered bipeds, who on closer inspection turned out to be human beings!

Yes, they were undoubtedly fellow-creatures painted up, decorated profusely with large, gaudy-coloured feathers, and heads adorned with chaplets of flowers! They were victims devoted as a special propitiation offering to the outraged Serpent goddess, and consequently Gillett must

be amongst them. I called out, and at the sound of my voice the ambiguous-looking beings awoke from their uneasy slumbers, and glared at me as if I were the priest come to fetch them to the sacrificial stone of Tlilcoatl. Again I spoke, calling out the doctor's name, and this time I was delighted to hear his answering voice. Guided by his tones, for recognition was out of the question, I was soon beside his cage and frantically pulling at the golden bars, whilst he more sensibly suggested that I should cut the cords which bound his wrists. Having set him free so far, I handed him a knife, and then he from the inside and I from the outside commenced the tedious performance of hacking through the bars. We worked away for a considerable time before success crowned our efforts, and once during that period I had to hastily conceal myself from the prying eyes of a sentinel who came round to see that all was safe. My one great fear was that daylight would overtake us in the midst of our work; such a calamity would effectually prevent either of us getting off scathless, for we should be recognized instantly if darkness removed her kindly cloak of concealment. Providentially, however, Gillett came out of his cage whilst night still wrapped the face of the earth, and I then cut the bonds of the other poor wretches, presented two of them with a knife apiece, and told them when they had freed themselves to pass the instruments on to the others.

As the doctor stepped forth from his cage, I had, for the first time, sufficient leisure to take stock of his appearance, and it was so utterly comical that I nearly brought on a fit of apoplexy in trying to suppress my laughter! He had been stripped of his European costume, and was now robed solely in a waistband. But the scantiness of his attire was magnificently atoned for by the brilliancy of his skin. His chest was painted a bright vermilion, the arms were a dark yellow, and the legs

purple. Much art had been exhibited in the tasteful decoration of his face, snakes and reptiles being vividly depicted thereon in colours as varied as those which adorned Joseph's coat! At rather close intervals over his body, tufts of feathers had been glued on, giving him an appearance comparable only to that of a gigantic half-plucked goose. With the addition of a wreath of flowers around his curly brown locks, he was in the full dress of a victim dedicated to the devil, or rather to the Serpent goddess. It was in vain that I attempted to suppress my laughter. Nothing I had ever seen was so irresistibly comical as this grave medical man personating the bird whose attribute is crass ignorance and stupidity. As he looked at me with eyes bordered by crimson snakes, I was so overcome that I literally fell to the ground in my futile endeavours to repress my merriment, and gave vent to convulsive shrieks of laughter. My ill-timed mirth brought a stern reprimand upon me.

"You are a fool, Wrenforth!" said the doctor angrily. "Your idiotic shrieking will bring the sentinels upon us very quickly. Besides, I should think that sympathy would be more appropriate than laughter. Just imagine the danger of having the cutaneous exhalation suppressed by two coats of this confounded paint! The skin is the supplemental organ of the lungs—indeed it does more of the breathing than the latter—and if you were not in a very degraded state of ignorance concerning the most elementary facts of physiology, you would at once perceive that I run an imminent risk of asphyxia."

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," I quoted; and then another glance at the half-plucked bird rekindled my merriment. "I shall die of asphyxia too," I continued, "if I have to bottle up my laughter much longer. For goodness' sake let us get into a safe place where I may laugh consumedly."

The doctor was boiling with rage, but the expression of

passion on his face simply added to my amusement, for, thanks to the paint and the reptiles, it became perverted into a sardonic grin and a comical elevation of the eyebrows.

"Will you remember that we are still in the power of ferocious savages," he exclaimed in the low, suppressed tones of furious rage. "Your conduct will cost you your life."

Gillett's words put a little reflection into my head, and by an exhausting effort I at last succeeded in curbing my sense of humour, and in bringing my mind to a consideration of the perils which hemmed us in on every side. I took off a cloak I was wearing, and gave it to Gillett with an urgent request that he would promptly cover his vermillion chest and goose-feathers. When this was done, I handed him a revolver and prepared to pioneer him to the upper regions. With a final glance at the cages wherein the other human birds were working with great energy, I was about to leave the menagerie when I discovered that two of them were our Indians. We gave them a few words of encouragement, and advised them to make straight for the northern gate, as being the nearest post in the hands of the friendly Deesmunxiatli ; then we went off, and never saw the unfortunate men again. Probably they were detected and killed before leaving the palace grounds.

We went quickly up the stone steps, and passed through the corridors without meeting any one until the exit came in view, when we perceived a sentinel whose attitude plainly betokened that we were discovered. By some good chance he advanced to meet us, passing the guard-room without alarming the inmates ; and as he leisurely came forward, we deemed it advisable to halt, particularly as he had brought his formidable spear to the charge.

"What shall we do?" I asked Gillett. "If we fire we run the risk of bringing the whole force of the palace about our ears."

I greatly lamented the absence of our knives at this juncture, for by their aid we might have quickly and silently got rid of the foe, but they were at this moment helping to set free five prisoners in the vault below.

"Don't fire," said Gillett rapidly. "Let us go forward with hands up in the air in token of submission, and then, when well under his spear, I will throw my cloak at him, whilst you must rush in and throttle him."

We now moved on again in the humble attitude prescribed, and were just on the point of making a sudden rush, when, to our surprise, the sentinel lowered his lance and touched the earth with his fingers—a most unmistakable token of submission on his part. The man's behaviour was most puzzling, and whilst I was wondering whether it did not conceal some cunning method of getting us into his power with small danger to himself, he began to speak, and his words gave me the clue to his conduct.

"The *Hig* (lord) can go forth unharmed. I am the slave whose life he saved."

"I rejoice at your friendly accents," I replied, "but I am ignorant of having rendered you the service you mention."

"Hast thou forgotten that thou didst risk a mutiny at the great pyramid by interfering to save my scalp from the hands of thy Indian, whom may Tlilcoatl speedily bring to her sacrificial stone?"

"Ah, now I remember," I replied. "And thou hast nobly repaid me for my small service. Come on, Gillett," I continued. "We may fearlessly advance, for I saved this poor fellow from your bloodthirsty Chotil's scalping-knife."

If Fortune favours the brave, she also helps the merciful, and it was solely owing to my having risked a mutiny of my own men to rescue this savage from a cruel torture, that the doctor and I ever escaped from the clutches of the Tlilcoatli. Truly this madcap expedition of mine enabled

me to lay up a few pearls of precious price, and taught me to feel that the cultivation of virtue not only helped us to a better existence hereafter, but was of practical utility in this present vale of tears. It made me picture an ideal life, and strive hard to live as near to it as possible, although the feeble human efforts fell very far short of its perfection. Nevertheless the effort was made, and the very earliest attempts to apply my heart unto this wisdom brought a peace which soothed me in the midst of danger, and lightened grief in the hour of bitter sorrow.

My grateful Tlilcoatl warrior did not show his gratitude by halves, for he insisted upon accompanying us through the gardens, and guided us past groups of soldiers, whose suspicions were lulled by seeing us in confidential intercourse with one of their own tribe. If any one approached too closely, our guide would stop and pretend to be engaged in private conversation, which the superficially polite Atlicaligui were too well bred to intrude upon. Thus guarded, we crossed the zone of light, and gained the shelter of the trees just as day was breaking. It was necessary now to proceed rapidly, for it would be broad day before we could reach the western gate ; so thanking the warrior for his timely assistance, I touched his forehead with my finger and hurried with Gillett to the northern end of the garden, climbed the palisades, and ran as fast as possible to the Road of the Rampart. With a feeling of relief, we gained this road without meeting any opposition, and at a little distance I could see the round bastions which marked the spot where Amu's soldiers were keeping the gate.

Being now within reach of assistance, we proceeded more leisurely, and I had time to once again laugh at Gillett's grotesque appearance as seen in the fast-coming daylight. But my derision was speedily banished by an exclamation of the doctor's, and as I looked in the direction towards which he was pointing, I saw with dismay that the Ruby

Serpent of the Tlilcoatli had supplanted the Diamond Cross of the Deesmuniatl at the gate.

"They are lying about utterly unprepared for an enemy," I remarked. "We may therefore be able to rush through before they can get a hit at us."

"It seems the only chance of getting back to our friends, so let us move quickly," said Gillett.

"You had better hide yourself as much as possible behind me," I could not help saying. "Your gala costume will be sure to attract attention long before it is desirable."

Whilst talking, we had moved rapidly onward until we were abreast of the first bastion of the gate. The curved outline of this structure obscured us from the careless watch of the sentinels, so that we were absolutely passing them before our presence was discovered. Luckily one valve of the gate was wide open, and we got through before the guards had time to seize their arms. Totally ignoring their shouts, we ran at full speed down the zigzags to the river, pursued by half a dozen of the savage warriors. Whilst I was untying the boat, Gillett had to use his revolver rather freely, and I carried away an unpleasant memento of this skirmish in the shape of an ugly scalp-wound, made by an arrow as I was stooping to unfasten the boat's painter. The sound of firearms cooled the ardour of the enemy, and we were able to embark without any further molestation, and proceed up the stream to the southern gate, which, being situated between the Deesmuniatl and Ra-teotl quarters, was still held by friends.

At last Gillett and I once more trod the paths of Amu's garden. Barely twenty-four hours had elapsed since we greeted the sun as the joyful harbinger of a day of peace and enjoyment; now we watched it rise in dire uncertainty as to what even the next hour might bring forth. Peace had flown from the city, and hatred and ambition threatened to involve all in a common ruin. As I neared the palace, I became deeply agitated at the thought of having to break

the news of Amu's capture to his family. Oosita worshipped her father, and I trembled at the effect this cruel blow would have upon her sensitive organization. I also ran great risk of falling not only in her estimation, but in that of her tribe, for I had gone forth with him, had seen him captured, and had returned without making a single effort on his behalf. My agitation and self-reproach at last became so extreme that I clutched Gillett by the arm, and told him that I dared not face Oosita with such sad news about her parent.

"Poor girl, I pity her," said the doctor kindly. "It means that she will have to choose between sacrificing herself to Ambouli and sacrificing her father. However, if you lack the nerve to break such unpleasant news, I will undertake the task directly I can get out of these feathers and paint."

"She shall never surrender herself to the Serpent chief," I answered bitterly. "The moment I become convinced that nothing can save her from his clutches, I will kill her with my own hand."

"Good heavens, Wrenforth, have you taken leave of your senses?" asked the doctor. "You must drop sentiment in these perilous times, and refrain from interfering in the domestic affairs of Chalco. I agree with you that Oosita is much too good to mate with a savage brute like Ambouli, but if such an arrangement becomes a political necessity, neither you nor I have any right to lift our fingers against it."

"I have the best of all rights—that of being her affianced husband," I answered, indignant at Gillett's callous way of disposing of women's hearts at the dictates of political urgency.

My answer came like a thunderclap on the doctor.

"When did you perpetrate this foolery?" he gasped out.

"Yesterday," I answered curtly, for his mode of address was far from polite.

"Then if you persist in carrying your mad passion to the point of marriage, I should advise you to make up your mind to settle in Chalco for the rest of your days. To bring Oosita as your wife outside the pale of this peculiar civilization, will simply result in your social annihilation, and curse your future with bitter misery and endless regret."

"Have you anything to say against the girl herself?" I asked, with a heart full of rage at so sweeping a prophecy.

"No; she is all that is charming and good," said Gillett. "But you are well aware of the prejudice that exists in England against any taint in the blood?"

"That objection does not apply to Oosita," I answered hotly. "She is more English than Egyptian, and an Egyptian is not a Negro nor a treacherous Asiatic. If you have seen her finger-nails, you will have discovered for yourself that they do not possess an atom of tell-tale discolouration."

"I care for nothing you may urge in her defence," replied the doctor. "The fact remains that she is no fit wife for you, and I should almost hail her disappearance, to turn up again as Ambouli's bride, as a blessing in disguise."

I forgot to laugh, as was my usual custom, when Gillett uttered these words, with an angry vehemence which seemed intended to convey a deliberate insult to the girl I almost worshipped. I retorted bitterly that I should resent the least slight put upon her as if it had been offered to me, and thus for the first time in our lives Gillett and I had a serious quarrel. With a sullen feeling of rage, I parted from him the moment we reached the atrium, with the intention of telling the lady Amu of her husband's capture; but the ladies had fortunately retired, so that I had one disagreeable task the less to perform. By this time the wound in my head had become intolerably painful, so that I was forced to go to my room, where I was glad to find Gillett conspicuous by his absence. Utterly worn

out in mind and body, I threw myself upon the luxurious feather-bed and enjoyed a sound sleep for some hours. When I awoke I found that the doctor had strapped up my broken head. He never allowed temper to hinder his rendering professional aid wherever required !

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SERPENT'S FANGS.

I AROSE from my couch ill at ease, and feeling intense pain and giddiness from the scalp-wound received the night before. However, a luxurious bath helped to restore me somewhat, and having completed my toilette, I went into the atrium to gather any fresh news concerning Amu. I had just commenced to address the officer on duty, when a dainty figure descending the golden stairway drove all other thoughts out of my head. With an abruptness that must have been disconcerting to the soldier, I turned and left him and hastened to the foot of the stairs to salute my lovely princess.

She was very pale and sad as she placed her taper fingers on my forehead, and the wistful, grief-stricken look in her eyes was eloquent enough to tell me that she was fully acquainted with the misfortune that had overtaken her father. I felt like a culprit before that tearful gaze, and almost cursed the selfishness which had prompted me to flee with Gillett from the vicinity of Ambouli's palace. I was no longer the hero she had pictured me, but a miserable creature who loved his own life too well to risk it for another's. This was her opinion of me now in her heart of hearts, although her innate refinement would never permit her to give expression to it. I stood before her in gloomy hesitation, uncertain whether to commence a lame attempt at exculpation, or to boldly acknowledge my fault

and tell her that I would set off then and there to attempt a rescue. At last her sweet lips framed a sentence, and broke a silence which, to my over-wrought nerves, seemed almost as bitter as death itself.

"Tell me how it came to pass that my father was captured and you escaped," she said in accents which gave no clue to her inmost thoughts.

I explained every detail in its bare simplicity. No attempt was made to add a particle of colour to my share in the business, and I experienced a kind of desperate delight at presenting to her all the scraps of evidence with the impartiality of a judge. Looking back now on these events, I have no difficulty in satisfying myself that I could scarcely have acted otherwise than I had done. Perhaps the momentary hesitation when I heard Amu turn away with his two captors was blamable, but had the door through which they passed not been so near at hand, I should have caught them up and commenced a desperate struggle, which would have alarmed the soldiers, and possibly have terminated to the fatal disadvantage not only of Amu, but of Gillett and myself also. But at that period love threw its mystical glamour over everything, distorting an error of judgment into a terrible lapse from the paths of bravery, and rendering me supremely miserable by urging me to believe that I had basely deserted Oosita's father in the hour of danger. As I was recounting all the incidents connected with Gillett's escape, our footsteps had insensibly wandered from the palace towards the summer-house, which had afforded me so many hours of sweet enjoyment beneath its shelter. When we arrived at the entrance I gently urged my companion within, and then took her to my arms and fondly embraced her.

"Can you still love me?" I asked excitedly. "I was only unfortunate, not cowardly."

"No blame whatever attaches to you," she said quickly, seeing that my very life was hanging on her answer.

"Besides, I do not greatly fear that the Tlilcoatl will offer any indignity to my father."

"Your words relieve me very much," I replied. "But do you think it likely that so ambitious a man as Ambouli will let slip his golden opportunity of humbling your tribe? The lord Amu's liberty will only be granted on condition that he withholds all support to Cephren in the coming attack, and recognizes the Tlilcoatl chief as king in the event of his success."

"I am afraid there will be another condition added to this," said Oosita mournfully.

"And what may that be?" I asked.

"That the Princess Oosita be forced to become the bride of the lord Ambouli!"

"By heavens, that shall never be!" I exclaimed furiously. "If he wants his bride he must fetch her over my dead body, for I swear that no one shall possess you whilst I am living. But, darling," I continued persuasively, "why should we not put it out of the power of Ambouli to persecute us? In a few days my Indians will be ready to march, and then we can steal silently out of the city and leave all its malice behind us for ever. Come with me to my own country, where, if the sun does not shine quite so brightly as here, its strong government can protect the weak and crush with an iron heel any attempt to subvert authority. All these tribal disputes are an impossibility with us, and peace and happiness reign in the place of your endless bickerings and jealousies. I can offer you a home replete with luxury, and the society of some of our best and noblest men and women. It is dangerous for us both to linger here, and now that the priest of Ra-teotl has divulged to us the secret of the road of the Hieroglyph, we can soon get on to the track of civilization."

"My father, my mother!" sighed Oosita. "I cannot desert them."

"Ah, weigh your words before you speak!" I interrupted.

"Think of the miseries the future may have in store, if you reject my proposition. Successful rebellion will make Ambouli a remorseless tyrant, and will sign the death-warrant of us both."

"Do not urge me to take such a step," she answered tearfully. "Have I not cause enough for sadness in the knowledge that my father is in the hands of a relentless foe, who will use him as a stepping-stone to power, without adding to it a lasting remorse for having forsaken him at the moment his authority and even safety is tottering in the balance? Were I to adopt the course you advocate, I should outrage all those ties of affection which our sacred religion has pronounced holy."

"Some plan for our safety must be formed, and quickly too," I replied sullenly. "In another few days the storm will burst, and if we are not heedful the lord Amu, his family, and his white relations, will be crushed by the cruelly strong hand of the Serpent-worshipper. There is one part of my scheme that the ladies of your household ought to adopt without delay, and it is to retire from the city to some secure point on the frontier until peace is re-established. I could get canoes prepared for the journey in a very short space of time."

"We have already discussed this plan," said Oosita; "but as my mother refuses to move until the lord Amu is released, her daughters must remain by her side."

"But you at least ought to go," I pleaded. "Ambouli's whole aim and object is to get you—and you alone—into his power."

"The danger is more imminent for you," she replied. "One of the Tlilcoatl stipulations for the restoration of my father is sure to be the surrender of the white men, and I am afraid the Deesmunxiatli will consent to anything to ensure the liberty of their lord. Perhaps they are deliberating even now this very point."

"Who are deliberating?" I inquired, considerably as-

tonished at the confusion which overwhelmed Oosita as she uttered her last words.

"I did not wish you to know," she answered, so hesitatingly that my curiosity was aroused.

"What secret are you trying to hide from me? Tell me at once, or I shall have to make inquiries."

"I was terrified for fear they might require you to be delivered up immediately," sobbed Oosita, "so gave orders that you were not to be told of the meeting."

"I presume you mean that the Tlilcoatli are now discussing terms of peace with your tribe?"

"Yes," answered Oosita. "And your friend agreed with me that you would have a much better chance of freedom if you kept away. He will send off a messenger directly an adverse decision is arrived at, and then you will escape down the zigzags to where a well-provisioned canoe and three of your Indians are waiting to receive you."

"Did you and Gillett hatch this plot between you?" I inquired.

"Yes," she answered, somewhat frightened at the stern ring in my voice.

"And what will become of my friend if the Deesmunx-iatli agree to sacrifice us?"

"He will take his chance of fighting his way to the boats with the remaining Indians."

"Does Gillett think me so mean and pitiful as to run away from him at such a crisis?" I exclaimed vehemently, more to myself than to Oosita. "If I had a hundred lives I would give them all, rather than desert a comrade in his extremity."

Oosita burst into a torrent of tears as I announced my determination, not only of rejecting the carefully-prepared plan for my security, but of proceeding forthwith to the place of meeting, where I undoubtedly ought to be at such a critical moment. Her tears and anguish softened my angry heart—not angry with her, poor darling, but with Gillett,

who had dared to imagine his villainous scheme would be acceptable to me. I laid her sweet head on my shoulder, thanked her for her loving interest in my welfare, and made her understand how impossible it was for me to beat so dishonourable a retreat. Her argument was based upon the idea that my life now belonged to her, and that it was therefore my duty to adopt every means to preserve it intact. I wasted many precious minutes in convincing her that devotion could not be carried to the extent of surrendering one's honour; and when I at last succeeded in calming her agitation, I gave her a fond embrace, hurried her off to the palace, and then set out to hear for myself the result of the peace negotiations.

As I passed through the courtyard into the square, I noticed that the garrison was on the alert, and that two huge engines of war for throwing stones had been placed in position on the ramparts. Somewhat reassured at seeing these precautions, I moved rapidly towards the north-west angle of the square where the conference was being held, and arrived just in time to hear Amu reject some proposition with disdain. I glanced eagerly at the prisoner, and was glad to see that he had not been subjected to the indignity of being bound.

I soon learned the conditions upon which the freedom of Amu depended. They were four in number. The first stipulated for the active co-operation of the Deesmunxiatl in deposing the King, and after much discussion it had been agreed that they should remain neutral. The second demanded the recognition of Ambouli as king of the confederacy, and this had been assented to. A long and stormy debate ensued when the third condition was brought forward, for as it involved nothing less than the immediate marriage of Oosita to the Serpent chief, it touched Amu and his nobles in their most vulnerable part. Nevertheless, the general feeling was in favour of the sacrifice, and I heard with sinking courage that Amu had given in

on this vital point. The fourth condition was, as I had all along expected, the surrender of the white men and their followers to the priests of Tlilcoatl, who would punish them properly for the indignities they had offered to the goddess ! This proposition was only just being considered as I arrived on the scene, and it was Amu's disdainful refusal to accede to it which had caught my ear.

As the debate proceeded, I noted with anxiety that many of our staunchest friends gradually ceased to offer opposition, excusing their conduct by asserting that their first duty was to their chief, who must be saved at all costs. At last only Amu's voice could be heard in our behalf, and then his nobles appealed to him to secure the peace of the city by the sacrifice of his guests.

Never shall I forget the proud and haughty gesture with which the lord of the Diamond Cross silenced his officers, nor the look of indignation which he cast at them !

"For fifty suns," he exclaimed in a loud, clear voice, "I have striven to obey the commands of Xexuteotl as revealed to us through Deesmunx. Shall I then, at your bidding, give the lie to my previous life by forsaking the stranger and the friendless ? Would not this be a wicked deed, and could I continue to live with a heart shrivelled up with the shame of it ? Urge me no more, I command you, for I will not forfeit my place in the Eternal Life by a wilful disregard of God's ordinances. You would cruelly torture these white men," he continued, turning to Ambouli. "Take then my life by the same means and let these others go, for they are my guests, and I am responsible for them to the Great Being who sent them to my charge."

An emotion of deep reverence swept over me as Amu uttered these words so replete with dignity, so filled with the pure spirit of Christianity. How insignificant seemed all the pomp, vanity, and circumstance by which he was encircled in comparison to the lofty moral height on which he stood, as it were, apart from all men ! He who could

speak such sentiments in the midst of worldly peril, and be prepared to carry them out in his own person, had surely conquered the grovelling tendencies of humanity, and was not merely lord of a petty tribe but king of men ! This truly was a hero—not a hero risking his life in the mad turmoil and excitement of battle, when the blood is up and wounds are scarcely heeded, but a hero calmly, dispassionately desiring to terminate his existence by cruel torments rather than violate a single ordinance of his sublime Faith ! I realized the magnificence of his sacrifice as I bowed my head with emotion, and silently thanked God that Oosita was the daughter of so noble a parent ; then I started forward and raised my hands—for my lips would frame no words—in energetic protest against Amu's proposition.

"Back, back !" exclaimed the lord of the Diamond Cross, seeing me advance towards him. "If you get beyond reach of my soldiers, the enemy will seize you."

"As I reverence Xexuteotl, you shall not die for me !" I answered, still moving towards him across the vacant space which separated the two rival tribes. "Go back in peace to your wife and daughters, and tell them that Lord Wrenforth willingly gives up his life for the noblest man he has ever met."

"Let me settle this," exclaimed a voice at my elbow. "Return to the Deesmunxiatli, and I will parley with Ambouli."

It was Gillett who spoke, but the sound of his familiar accents, last heard in denunciation of my peerless princess, aroused my slumbering indignation, and I turned angrily away from him, intending to place myself in the power of the Tlilcoatli, who were already staring wonderingly at our advance towards their ranks. The doctor was soon by my side again, and, seizing me savagely by the shoulder, exclaimed—

"Do not carry your folly to this extremity. In another minute you will be irrevocably doomed."

"And what care I if I am?" I asked bitterly. "Yonder is the true friend, ready to lay down his life for my sake. Never has he, by gibe or insult, wounded my feelings, and now he is ready to complete the heroic gentleness of his existence by an heroic death! Let me go, Gillett, for Amu is a man worth dying for!"

"He is," answered the doctor. "But you are not his only friend, and therefore I claim the right of seniority in settling this affair. In fact, I have settled that you must go back and I must go forward."

"This is childish," I exclaimed irritably. "You have no right to interfere with my arrangements, and I therefore beg that you will remove your detaining hand from my shoulder, and permit me to do what I consider proper."

"Come, Wrenforth, be reasonable, and do not let your impetuosity and anger combine to ruin every one of us," urged Gillett. "Do you not see how loosely Amu is guarded? Well, I believe that if we made a sudden dash with our Indians we could rescue him; and Chotil merely awaits the uplifting of my hand to hurl his men upon the Tlilcoatli with irresistible fury."

Whilst the doctor was speaking, I had been noticing a curious movement amongst the rear column of the foe which I was at a loss to account for. By groups of three or four they had separated themselves from the main body, and, moving off to the left, disappeared round the pyramid of Xexuteotl situated in the centre of the square. As they did not reappear again, and as the stream of stragglers still continued to meander always towards the same point, I began to imagine there might be something sinister in it. Instead of returning the snappish answer I had ready for the doctor, I directed his attention to the suspicious straggling, telling him that at least sixty or seventy men must be somewhere behind the pyramid by this time.

"They are up to some infernal treachery," said Gillett, after a hasty but furtive glance round. "Stay where you

are," he continued, "and keep Ambouli amused with your offer to surrender whilst I prepare a countermine for the rascal. Wily as he is, he shall not circumvent me!"

Thus speaking, Gillett retired with a most disconsolate air, as if I had persuaded him not to sacrifice himself for the good of Amu. In a few seconds he was hidden from view by the dense mass of Deesmunxiatl warriors which closed up around him, but I was convinced he had had time to give instructions to Chotil, for this chief and his followers now appeared well to the front, lounging about in listless attitudes. Full five minutes passed, during which I was occupied in pleading with Amu, at the same time listening with strained ears for some sign which would indicate what was taking place in our rear.

It came at length in the shape of a shrill whistle from Gillett. For a moment I looked behind me, and saw that the scattered groups of Tlilcoatl had united themselves into two compact bodies beneath the shelter of the pyramid, and, emerging on its south side, had gone, one to assault Amu's palace, the other to attack our rear. Gillett was only just in time to put the Deesmunxiatl soldiers on their guard against this unheard piece of treachery, and I saw him advance with a phalanx against the enemy. At the instant the whistle was given, Chotil and his men gave a wild war-whoop, charged down past where I was standing, and were amongst the Tlilcoatl almost before I was. Amu's guards were thoroughly surprised by the suddenness of the attack, and were driven back, leaving the lord of the Diamond Cross as our prize. I watched Ambouli's eyes glittering with rage as he saw the tables so beautifully turned upon him; he was like a wild beast in his frantic endeavours to re-form his men and lead them against us. Once his long spear was lunged at me from behind two files of his soldiers, fortunately without effect; but I manifested my opinion of his conduct by discharging my revolver at him, and had the supreme satisfaction of hitting him in the right arm.

With Amu in our midst, we now fell back upon the main body, who received their lord with shouts of acclamation. But the foe had by this time recovered from his surprise, and fiercely assaulted us as we moved to the assistance of Gillett and his phalanx. Our party, not numbering more than sixty, was almost surrounded by hordes of savages, whom we could hardly keep at bay by volley after volley of musketry fire. Notwithstanding all opposition, we effected a junction with Gillett, and scattered the enemy opposed to him. It was now a question of hurrying up in double quick time to save the palace from the Tlilcoatli who had been told off to attack it. How my heart beat with anxiety, as we raced across the square to come up with the enemy, who had penetrated to the courtyard. Had they had time yet to massacre the few defenders and find their way to the inner apartments? As I pictured Oosita in the grasp of vile savages, I set my teeth hard and pushed on so rapidly that I was through the palace gates, and fighting desperately before any of my comrades came to my support. Gillett, Amu, and the Indians were soon with me, and with our rifles and revolvers cleared a red lane, up which we charged to the atrium. With a sigh of heartfelt thankfulness, I saw that a few brave men had successfully held the entrance, and I breathed freely again with this assurance of Oosita's safety. Meanwhile the gates had been closed before Ambouli could reach them, the ramparts were manned, and we had now only to deal with the Tlilcoatli inclosed in the courtyard; these, seeing their position untenable, threw down their arms and begged for quarter, which was granted.

For a time the danger was averted; but if Ambouli decided to lay siege to the palace our fate was sealed, for his vast superiority in numbers would speedily prevail against the weak fortifications, which, besides, were too extensive to be efficiently manned. All that men could do was done. The walls were loopholed for the forty rifles we

could muster ; an inner wall of defence was built all around the palace, behind which the soldiers could retreat when driven from the ramparts ; and the lovely gardens were converted into a bivouac for the garrison.

Notwithstanding every precaution which skill or ingenuity could suggest, I had a profound presentiment that the days of the refined and Christian Deesmunxiatli were numbered, and that before many hours had elapsed our last fight would have been fought, and civilization would have succumbed to the savage force of heathenism. But this very presentiment, bristling with the idea of annihilation, only helped to nerve me to a greater power of resistance, and I resolved with a grim smile to rid the world of a goodly number of *Tilcoatli* before I sank into the arms of death.

Then came the thought of Oosita, with all the sweet and bitter reflections her image conjured up. If her father, Gillett, and myself were killed, what would become of her ? Could I let her survive the wreck of all her hopes to drag out her life as the bride of a brutal savage ? I had often threatened to kill her rather than let her undergo this fate, but when I now stood within a very few hours' journey of that bourne whence no traveller ever returns, a religious feeling seemed to withhold my hand and whisper that such a deed would not be accounted a good action but a deliberate murder. At last I salved my conscience by a compromise. Sending a messenger to request Oosita to receive me, I was ushered into the quaintly-pretty drawing-room where the ladies were assembled, and occupied in mournfully discussing the chance of successfully resisting Ambouli's assault. Without loss of time, I explained my desire of converting their room into the palladium of the palace, and of arming its fair occupants with revolvers, so that they might be able to resist to the last. I added significantly to Oosita that it might be advisable to reserve one bullet, as a means of escape from Ambouli's importunities. She understood the hint, and smiled in my face so sweetly, but with such an air

of resolution, that I took her to my arms and tenderly embraced her. The lady Amu looked so astonished at this exhibition of my feelings that I felt an explanation was due to her.

"Though this is not a time to think of marrying or giving in marriage," I began, "yet should it please Xexuteotl to bring us safely through these troubles, my fondest hope will be to claim the Princess Oosita as my bride. We love one another. Need I say more?"

"Xexuteotl has sent thee to be a shield and defence to my child," answered the lady Amu. "Thou art of our race and religion; thou art chivalrous and brave, gentle and polished. Gladly therefore do I consent to give my daughter into thy care, feeling sure that thou wouldest make her happiness thine own."

"My aim will ever be to surround her with such deep love and devotion, that her life shall be as happy as human effort can make it."

Oosita came close to my side, and placed her hand in mine with a glance full of trust and affection. The lady Amu regarded us both intently with her grave, earnest eyes, and then spoke.

"I have no misgivings for the future, for thou art a brave man, and the brave are always kind. But I know not what my husband will have to say to this, for matters of policy may sway his heart more than the promptings of love. He may even object to your suit for fear you would wish to carry Oosita away to your far-off country."

"I should experience but very little difficulty in traversing the road of the Hieroglyph," I answered. "Oosita and I could travel into the realms of civilization, and yet revisit your mysterious city twice in a year. Surely that would remove your lord's objection?"

The lady Amu was about to reply, when the appearance of the chamberlain checked her words. He advanced to where I was sitting, and announced that Sethi, high priest

of Ra-teotl, was most solicitous to obtain an interview with me. Although the interruption was very inopportune, yet I felt constrained to make my adieux and follow the domestic to the atrium where Amu, Gillett, and the principal nobles were seated in solemn conclave with the pontiff.

"Welcome, thrice welcome!" exclaimed the priest of Ra. "You and your brother hierophant will be able to explain to the descendants of Deesmunx the meaning of the portents I have witnessed. They are signs which foretell a mighty catastrophe to the nation; they are special annunciations from heaven of a terrible political convulsion."

"Let me hear what they are," I replied, secretly amused at the solemn air of conviction which pervaded the priest's countenance.

"For the past three nights, as I have been wrapt in the contemplation of the celestial bodies, a comet of great brilliancy has suddenly darted from the far horizon and stood over this city, where it gradually paled until its light died away. Then a strange illumination broke out in the east, and spreading out from its base, assumed a pyramidal form, with its apex towering up to the zenith. It resembled a vast sheet of fire thickly powdered with stars. After shining with supernatural brilliancy for a short time, it became darker and darker, and was finally extinguished—a sure sign of the overthrow of the worship of Ra. Then out of the deep, mysterious darkness, I heard low voices, doleful wailings, and strange whisperings, as if announcing the approach of terrible, heart-rending calamities. For the last three nights have these signs been vouchsafed unto me, and my spirit has been saddened by reading in these prodigies the speedy downfall of the kingdom. The fatal warning has come, and it behoves us as men to prepare to meet the rapidly nearing storm."

"Can mighty events cast their shadows before them in their coming?" asked Amu.

"I believe they can," was my confident reply; for I still

remembered the vision I had had the day before we took the plunge into the morasses which led to Chalco, and I was firmly convinced that its prophetic foreshadowings had already come to pass.

"Then what interpretation do you put upon these signs and portents of Sethi?" continued Amu.

"That they betoken great danger to the State," I replied. "But I do not believe that they necessarily imply the total subversion of the kingdom, for warnings are sent in order that the faithful may be prepared to meet the cunning devices of the enemy. Forewarned is forearmed, and therefore we may even yet prevail against Ambouli's legions by the exercise of skill and judgment."

"Why don't you disabuse their heads of all this superstitious nonsense, instead of encouraging it?" whispered Gillett. "We shall now have them wanting to waste valuable time in offering up sacrifices, consulting the oracle, and so forth."

"I believe every word I have said," I answered haughtily. "Besides, you forget that ancient history teems with examples in support of my contention. Have you consigned to oblivion the awful signs which heralded the destruction of Jerusalem? Do you not remember that Lucan gives an enumeration of the prodigies witnessed in the Roman capital,¹ and that the great Machiavelli did not disdain to give the subject a separate chapter in his discourses?"²

"Bosh!" muttered the doctor impatiently. "I am at present more concerned to know what the royal tribe intends to do, than to listen to your quotations from the classics."

"Then you had better address yourself to Sethi, and not to me," was my angry reply.

Gillett turned hastily away, and at once sounded the priest on this point.

¹ *Pharsalia*, lib. I.

² *Discorsi sopra Tito Livio*, lib. I. cap. 56.

"Your tribe must immediately arm itself, attack the Tlilcoatl guards, and drive them from the palace and grand square," he said. "When this is done, the square must be barricaded and made the very centre of our resistance."

"But the Tlilcoatl have not as yet shown the least hostility against us," objected Sethi. "Their behaviour is thoroughly reassuring."

"Can you not fathom their designs?" asked Gillett. "They will amuse you with submission until the Dees-munxiatli are crushed, and then they will fix their fangs in your throat."

"It may be so," said the priest doubtfully.

"Then why not bring the matter to the test?" continued the doctor. "Tell Cephren to send his royal mandate to Ambouli, requiring him to immediately cease besieging Amu in his palace, to retire to his own quarter, and to disband his men. If the King's order is obeyed, we shall know that the Serpent chief is no rebel; if it is not, arm your tribe and prepare to defend your monarch and religion."

"I will endeavour to carry out your suggestion," replied Sethi. "But Cephren is irate at your attack on the Tlilcoatl pyramid, and declares that he will countenance neither you nor your supporters, including of course my lord Amu."

"If he chooses to be wilfully blind, it is his own affair," said Gillett. "I have no kingdom to lose; if I had, I should display a little more common sense than he does at such a crisis, and not seek to alienate my best friends."

The high priest looked at Gillett gravely and then said, "I will do my best."

"Hurl all your supernatural signs with treble exaggerations at his head," added Gillett. "Do everything you can to make him wake up and see the volcano on whose crater he is sleeping so calmly, and hear the subterranean rumblings which presage an early and violent eruption."

"I will have a vision from Ra himself," said Sethi with a slight twinkle in his eyes.

"Right!" exclaimed Gillett with a laugh. "That will be more convincing than fifty thousand measures of miracles!"

After some further desultory conversation, the priest rose to go, and as he did so whispered to Gillett and me that if we would disguise ourselves he would take us to his temple, where there existed some sure places of concealment which we might be glad of, in case the worst came to the worst. Gillett was for refusing the invitation, but my thoughts flew to Oosita, and I realized how much better I could fight if I knew she was secure from the hateful love of Ambouli.

"Why should not one of us go and inspect it?" I asked. "A haven of safety in so colossal a building is an offer not to be despised."

"We can use it when the proper time arrives," said Gillett.

"Suppose Sethi should not be there when we fly to its shelter, how should we find our way to its intricacies? They are known to the high priest alone!"

"How can we leave Amu when he might be attacked at any minute?" asked the doctor.

"As we anticipate a total defeat, it becomes all the more urgent for us to have a second stronghold to retreat to. We could make the pyramid of Ra almost impregnable, by conveying there our spare guns, ammunition, and dynamite."

"Ah, that is a bright idea!" said Gillett. "One of us ought to go, if only to superintend the victualling of the place. Now, who shall it be—you or me? But perhaps you would prefer to stay here so as to protect the—the princess?"

In my irritable condition of mind, I regarded the doctor's hesitation in pronouncing Oosita's name as a sly hit at

my love, and consequently haughtily expressed my preference for accompanying the priest. I am afraid my tones were very offensive, for Gillett turned away curtly, with the remark that he would seek two men to convey the stores to the pyramid. After half an hour's delay, some of the most valuable goods were packed, but as they were more than our slender force could carry without attracting notice, Sethi promised to send some of his priests to convey away the remainder. I took charge of the dynamite, as being too precious as well as too dangerous to place in the hands of those who knew nothing of its properties, and thus equipped, bade a curt farewell to Gillett, passed through the gardens with Sethi, and went out through a small postern into the Road of the Rampart. As I marched along the almost deserted street, glistening white in the noonday sun, I breathed a fervent prayer that my mission might result in saving my darling from the Serpent's fangs.

CHAPTER XXII.

VÆ VICTIS !

I HAD not proceeded far when I began to regret the precipitancy with which I had started off with Sethi. Although I was justly incensed with Gillett for the contemptuous and insolent manner in which he had treated my love for Oosita, yet I began to blame myself for permitting anger to blind my judgment, and thus lead me away from the palace, perhaps at the very time when my princess required my protection most. Gillett would have no special interest in shielding her against the pestilent love of Ambouli—indeed, he would probably regard her capture as the very best thing that could happen for all parties ; Amu would be too much occupied in leading his men, or might be fatally wounded when the enemy burst into the palace ! The only piece of consolation I could give myself was that she was armed with a splendid revolver, and thus might be able to lodge a bullet in Ambouli's heart at the very moment he was about to pass his sacrilegious arms around her. I felt a grim kind of pleasure, which was thoroughly unchristian, at the idea of this savage Serpent chief being laid low by the hand of a woman ! If Jael was “blessed above women” for treacherously slaying Sisera, what homage or reverence would be sufficient for the brave girl who openly slew the foe who was seeking to degrade her ? The thought of such a splendid revenge for all that this Tlilcoatl chief

had made me go through, drove away for the time being my restless anxiety, and left me gloating over the vision of a prostrate enemy, incapable of working any more harm.

So occupied was I in dreaming out this desirable termination to all my troubles, that I did not address a single word to my companion until I found myself walking up the avenue of crio-sphinxes which led to the pyramid of Ra-teotl. Then I awoke to reality and to a sense of the courtesy of which I had been guilty. With a profusion of apologies, I explained how intently I had been striving to solve the problem of saving the ladies of Amu's household, in the event of the Tlilcoatli successfully storming the palace.

Sethi uttered a low, good-natured laugh, as he listened to my lame excuses.

"Where a charming princess is concerned, the problem becomes absorbingly interesting!" he exclaimed.

I gave him an inquiring look as I assented to his remark.

"The high priest of Ra and chief of the King's Council has many more eyes than the two provided by nature," he continued smilingly. "I have eyes which can penetrate into men's thoughts and motives as well as rest upon the gaudy gems which bedeck their helmets, and by these I have learned that the Princess Oosita is very dear to you!"

"Ah, yes!" I answered with a sigh. "So dear that my whole mind is occupied every minute, every second, with devising plans for her safety!"

"If I read the stars aright, you may take comfort!" said Sethi gently. "The prophecy of the soothsayer will be fulfilled, for Amu has shown himself ready to permit the Serpent to embrace his daughter—nay more, the princess has crossed the threshold of the polluted palace of Tlilcoatli! The Deesmunxiatl will vanish, her relations will perish,

and she only will preserve her life through her trust in the white man's love."

"Good heavens, your prediction is a very gloomy one!" I exclaimed.

"Would that I could make it more cheerful," answered Sethi. "But the wisdom of Ra has but one true interpretation, and this I have given you. The cloud from the east is now overshadowing the city; it has assumed the spiral of the Serpent seeking to entrap the Christian maiden; it has disgorged you from its darksome mists—you whom the stars point out as a second Deesmunx! Take comfort, therefore, and be not cast down with fear, for the princess and yourself seem destined to escape, even were it from out of a burning fiery furnace!"

"And Gillett, the bearer of the *scarabæus* of Amun-Ra—what of him?" I asked.

"I know not," said the priest. "I wish him well, for he is a mighty hierophant and learned in the hidden mysteries of our sacred cult. Yet the prophecy concerns him not, and the oracle is silent as to his future. Had he given his love to the Princess Eruna, his destiny would have been as secure as yours. But we have arrived at the end of the first gallery," he continued, looking cautiously around. "Here it is that you must pay heed to my directions, and carefully note what I say, first promising that you will not make use of the secret I am about to entrust to you, except in case of the direst necessity."

I readily gave the required pledge, and then keenly scrutinized the priest's movements. We were standing on a small landing about ten feet square, from which ascended a second flight of steps leading to the archive chamber of Olmi, so well known to Gillett. The walls surrounding me were profusely covered with polychromatous hieroglyphs, which recorded the names and virtues of many of the dead and bygone priests of Ra-teotl. Sethi moved towards the western wall, and pressed his hand against the *cartouche*

of Ispari ; then, with a warning to me to be watchful, he moved six paces to his right, and pressed against the *cartouche* of another priest. As he did this, a massive stone slowly revolved, revealing a deep recess behind it.

"Enter," said the priest. "Behind that block of stone thou art as safe from thine enemies as if a thousand miles intervened between you."

Brimful of curiosity, I stooped down and passed through the narrow opening into a room twice as large as the landing I had just quitted. Sethi followed me, closed the stony doorway, and lighted the intense darkness with a lamp.

"From this chamber I enable Cephren to govern Chalco," exclaimed Sethi. Then, seeing that I looked rather mystified, he continued, "From this place I can see every corner of the city, watch the gathering of tumultuous crowds, and hasten to warn the King when danger threatens, so that he may be prepared to meet it. Come this way, and I will show you."

As he spoke, Sethi advanced to the western face of the room, opened a small sliding panel, and I saw at once his meaning, for a series of short tubes enabled my eyes to roam over that part of the city allotted to the tribes of Ra-teotl and of Tlilcoatl. I could see the space in front of Ambouli's palace was full of armed men, and that all access to the square was cut off by detachments of soldiers, who closely guarded every avenue. I saw enough to convince me that the enemy was mustering all his forces for a grand attack upon Amu, and probably also upon the King.

When I had admired the admirable fan-shaped distribution of tubes which gave Sethi a secret and splendid view, the priest took me to the southern and northern ends of the apartment, where the same apparatus was at work. To obtain the eastern look-out we had to traverse a narrow tunnel, which passed beneath the stairs of the second gallery. From this point I was enabled to watch the proceedings of the Tlilcoatli who were besieging Amu's palace,

and I estimated that nearly two thousand men were employed in this duty. As yet the investment was incomplete, for the enemy was massed in the square, while the two roads which enclosed the gardens at the back of the palace were destitute of soldiers, thus leaving a safe way of escape if I could prevail upon the ladies to accept the refuge so generously offered by the priest of Ra.

I complimented Sethi upon the perfection of his detective arrangements as we returned to the room he called "the Chamber of the Oracle," but he astonished me by saying that he had other things more wonderful still to show me. In proof of his assertion he went to the south-west corner, touched a spring in what seemed apparently a solid block of stone, when its topmost section began to move, and ultimately disclosed a wide cavity, which extended downwards into Cimmerian darkness. As I gazed with awe into its mysterious depths, I perceived a kind of cradle attached to an iron chain swinging within my reach, and this I imagined was used for the purpose of comfortably conveying the priest to the bottom of the well.

"Would you care to descend?" asked Sethi.

"Whither does it lead?" I inquired. "If there is anything curious at its other extremity I will willingly accompany you."

"It leads to a chamber containing four openings," replied Sethi. "The first conducts you to a spot outside the city walls, and nearly at the base of the hill; the second is a subterranean passage to Cephren's palace; the third leads to that of Ambouli; the last, which unfortunately is incomplete, is destined to communicate with the Deesmunxiatl quarter."

My eyes gleamed with malicious delight as I learned that there was a secret communication between the pyramid and the residence of the Tlilcoatl chief, for I fancied that I saw a way, with the assistance of a few resolute men, of carrying the war into the enemy's quarter. I questioned

Sethi closely as to whether Ambouli or any one besides himself knew of the existence of these subterranean tunnels, and his answer was an emphatic negative, coupled with the information that his eldest son, who would succeed to the office of high priest at his decease, would only be made acquainted with these secrets on his death-bed. Reassured on this point, I then unfolded a plan of action which was peculiarly fascinating on account of its seeming feasibility. It was to march a body of men along the passage which terminated beneath Ambouli's audience chamber, to burst through upon the astonished Tlilcoatl, seize the palace and probably the chief himself. A successful raid such as this, would bring the Serpent-worshippers to their knees and force them to sue for peace, which I should advise Amu to grant only upon condition of a general disarmament of the tribe, and the insertion of a clause making it penal for any Tlilcoatl to carry or possess weapons without a special permit. By this means only would Chalco be assured of lasting tranquillity, and the peaceful Christian and Egyptian population be enabled to live in perfect security.

But when I suggested the introduction of a phalanx of warriors to the underground passage, Sethi wrung his hands in horror at the impiety of the thought. In vain I implored him to give permission, in vain I pointed out the tremendous advantages which would accrue to his King by surprising the rebels in the midst of their fortress; the priest was obdurate, hard as granite on this subject, and with a feeling of baffled rage I had to desist from my entreaties. Could I do nothing to make this man forget his paltry anxiety to conceal the channels through which he gathered information, which the people believed was revealed to him by Ra himself? No. His pride at being deemed an inspired prophet was too strong to suffer him to unveil the elaborate machinery of eavesdropping and spying, and proclaim himself a charlatan where he had been reverenced as something more than human. It was too much to expect of any man,

and I moodily paced the room trying to control my rage at the frustration of so fair an opportunity of crushing the foe. Before my annoyance had entirely evaporated, a demon whispered a suggestion, which I at once saw would have the same effect as a whole legion of soldiers, and which effect, moreover, could be accomplished by one man ! I rapidly explained this to Sethi, who smiled grimly, and gave his consent to my putting the plan into immediate execution.

With hope revived I passed into a state of savage exultation, which lent great energy to my preparations. By this time all the guns and ammunition that Gillett could spare had been brought to the temple, and Sethi left me in order to see them transported to the landing opposite the Chamber of the Oracle, whence we could remove them to greater security at our leisure. I had kept close hold of my parcel of dynamite, and during Sethi's absence eyed it with an expression of deep affection, for it had now acquired a priceless value. Presently the priest returned, bringing with him one or two implements I required, and having taken possession of them, I announced myself ready to start.

Sethi unhooked the chain which supported the cradle, and directed me to take my place. The moment I was firmly seated I paid out the chain I held in my hand, and the weight of my body carried me slowly down a depth of about thirty feet, when I once more touched *terra firma*. By the aid of a lantern with which I was provided, I perceived I was in a vaulted chamber containing three exits ; I looked in vain for a fourth, until I remembered that the unfinished tunnel leading to the Deesmunxiatl quarter would probably be a continuation of the one which passed beneath Cephren's palace. Whilst I was examining the various outlets, the creaking of the chains informed me that Sethi was coming down, and in another instant he stood by my side.

"The extreme north-west passage leads to Ambouli's palace," he exclaimed. "I sincerely hope you will find him at home, and rid Chaleo of as turbulent a noble as it has ever possessed."

"Amen to that!" I ejaculated savagely.

"I will accompany you and witness the manifestation of the mysterious force," continued Sethi.

"You will be exposed to some risk," I answered. "Dynamite is very capricious in its action, and sometimes harms those who set its force in motion."

"I will take my chance with you," said the brave old priest. "As this may be the only opportunity I shall ever have of witnessing your wonderful power, I would not miss it for all the riches of Olmi."

"Promise then to implicitly obey my directions before I fire the charge."

"I will do everything you tell me," answered Sethi.

"Lead on then," I exclaimed, "for I am all impatience to get this horrible business over."

In perfect silence we plunged into the dark tunnel, and rapidly advanced through a moist and mephitic atmosphere, due to the absence of any attempt at ventilation. After being nearly suffocated, the air again became somewhat purer, and from this fact I inferred that we must be approaching our journey's end. Sethi now came close to me, and placing his fingers on his lips as a sign for me to keep silence, pointed to an upward slope in the tunnel.

"At the top of the ascent you are by the side of the hall of audience, and your feet are level with its floor," he whispered.

I muttered my thanks, urged him to retire to a safe distance, and then slowly mounted the slope alone. When I reached its highest elevation, I found a small level space large enough for a man to stand upon. Here I took up my position, and acting upon previous instructions, succeeded in finding a spring, by pressing which I was enabled to

slide back a panel, and then nothing but a few thin boards intervened between me and my vindictive enemies. From the numerous voices and sounds which reached me I knew the room was fairly well filled. Scraps of conversation and occasional maledictions on the sacrilegious white men were floated to my ears, but I could catch hold of nothing which gave me a clue to their designs, nor could I recognize any tones bearing the least resemblance to those of Ambouli.

After listening in vain for half an hour, I thought the time had arrived for putting my fell purpose into execution. With a shudder I placed the dynamite on the ledge between the walls of the room and the sliding-panel, and then attaching a time fuze, lighted it. No sooner had I done this when the full enormity of my awful deed flashed over me, and overwhelmed my conscience with the terrible sensations of a murderer. Instead of flying to place myself in security, I stood irresolutely watching the spitting tongue of flame as it slowly crept onward towards the innocent-looking packet lying so harmlessly on the ledge. Could I but have found a knife I would have cut the fuze in two, trampled out the fire, and have left the Tlilcoatl to seek death in a less horrible fashion ; but I had no means of doing this, so I stood by in a dazed manner until the ominous shortening of the fuze aroused me to a sense of my own danger. With a cry of alarm I turned and fled down the slope with such rapidity that I ran right into Sethi, who evidently was coming to ascertain the reason for my long delay.

“ Back, man, back, for your life ! ” I shouted, as I was picking myself up from the ground, whither I had been sent by the force of the collision.

Sethi both heard and understood me, for, by the time I had regained my legs, he was out of sight. Then I commenced to run for dear life, but barely had I gone six paces when a shock like an earthquake, accompanied by the splitting open of the stones of the tunnel, and a loud

deafening roar, threw me violently to the ground and deprived me of my senses !

When I recovered consciousness I found that, though considerably bruised and shaken, I was otherwise unhurt. Very much relieved at this, I next endeavoured to find out how long I had been insensible by striking a match and consulting my watch, but to my dismay I discovered that the shock of the explosion had stopped it ! I might have been here for days for all I knew, and Oosita might even now be Ambouli's bride unless the dynamite had cut short his career. But, after all, I could not have lain there very long, for Sethi was friend enough to be alarmed at my continued absence and come in search of me. This reflection was very reassuring, nevertheless I thought it high time to rekindle the lantern and retrace my steps to the secret room in the temple of Ra, for I was anxious to see for myself what havoc I had wrought on the foe. Having succeeded in getting a dim flicker, I went forward about five yards, when I found all further progress barred by the falling in of the sides of the passage. The barrier was so compact that I could not discover a crevice through which even a rat could crawl, and although I attacked it with a pick for a long time, I made so small an impression upon it that I gave up the attempt in despair. Then the question as to how many hours I had been imprisoned again forced itself upon my mind, for it was evident that Sethi must have been prevented from bringing relief by the same obstacle which cut me off from the world. It was bitterness to feel that I was shut up here inactive, whilst the fate of all I held dear was now being decided, or had even been irrevocably settled days ago ! I wrung my hands in agony, and ground my teeth with rage at the stupidity which had permitted a sentiment of mercy to delay my flight after the fuze was well alight—a sentiment that ought to have inspired me before I set out on the dangerous mission, not after ! It required no elaborate demonstration to prove that I was not a peculiarly skilful dynamitard ; I ought to have taken

a few lessons in *sang-froid* from the Nihilists before I began to play with such lethal toys !

I sat down tired by my exertions with the pickaxe, and considered my position deeply ; but the only conclusion I could come to was, that I had no other chance of finding an exit, except through the ruins of Ambouli's palace. As this would involve a perilous wandering through the Tlil-coatl quarter, I hesitated to adopt it and racked my brains to find some other alternative ; but nothing suggested itself, and I at last reluctantly felt compelled to make up my mind to run the risk.

With slow steps I worked my way down an enormous crater scooped out of the earth by the terrific energy of the explosive, then up to the other side until I emerged into what was once the hall of audience, but which now consisted of a ruined wall and a few broken columns exposed to the glare of the afternoon sun. The central portion of the building seemed almost entirely demolished ; the right wing was in a tottering condition, while the left appeared to have escaped disaster altogether. I ought to have felt overjoyed at the success of my efforts to render Ambouli houseless, but I was not, for a vague fear had seized hold of me that I must have been senseless in the crypt for six-and-twenty hours—a sufficiency of time to settle Oosita's future. The dynamite had been fired at three o'clock, and the position of the sun in the heavens told me that it was now five. Could two hours only have elapsed since that fatal moment, or had a night and a day rolled their long interval between. So vital was the decision of this question to my peace of mind, that I gave up the original intention of waiting for darkness before leaving my place of concealment, and determined to sally forth and trust to the priestly garments I wore to hide my identity.

I crept cautiously into the hall of audience, and worked my way slowly amongst the huge masses of *débris* which often threatened to block my advance. I had decided to try to gain the gardens at the back of the ruins, as the

homeward route in that direction was familiar to me, and I had a wholesome dread of taking my return journey through the square of Tlilcoatl, which was still probably a huge armed camp. By great perseverance and much bruising, I at last emerged on to the quartz paths of the pleasure-grounds, and to my infinite satisfaction saw that they were devoid of any signs of life. As soon as I reached the trees I began to run, and quickly gained the same spot in the palisades where Gillett and I had swarmed over a short while ago. I took a good look over the top before committing so indiscreet an act as scaling them in broad daylight, and seeing the street deserted, I placed myself on their outer side in an instant, and walked down the avenue with the grave and placid air of a priest of Ra-teotl. As I held my head very low down, and still retained a flowing white beard which, fortunately, the explosion had not disarranged, I was enabled to pass several groups of Tlilcoatl, and return a salutation to their reverent greeting.

Emboldened by these tributes to the perfection of my disguise, I determined to take a short cut homewards by passing through the grand square, and thence down one of the central avenues to the Deesmunxiatl quarter. Success rewarded my intrepidity, for I reached the southern gate without exciting the least suspicion in the hearts of the numerous foes I met. Here I found a strong force of Amu's soldiers posted, with strict orders to hold the position to the last man, and from this I gathered that my host had wisely determined to secure a line of retreat in case his palace became untenable. I also ascertained from the men, who welcomed me with shouts of joy as I threw aside my priestly robes, that Ambouli had as yet made no assault, for he had been greatly terrified by an earthquake which had thrown his lordly residence to the ground, and had rent a huge fissure in the pyramid of Tlilcoatl from the top to the bottom! When I asked them how long ago the earthquake had occurred, they said about three hours,

and this completely dispersed my theory that I had lost a night and a day. In an altogether happier frame of mind, I ordered an escort to accompany me along the Street of the Rampart to the postern in Amu's garden, and at length passed through it with a great sigh of relief, and hastened to the palace.

As I entered the atrium, my eyes fell upon the priest Sethi, who was volubly narrating some episode of a mournful character to a silent group consisting of Amu, Gillett, and a few other nobles. I advanced quietly towards them without attracting attention, so absorbed were they in the priest's tale. But when I stood behind Amu and heard a full and true account of my own death, how I was blown into minute, pulverized fragments, which went up into the air and never came down again, it was more than I could stand, and a burst of hearty laughter revealed the fact of my very substantial presence. Amu and Sethi stared at me as if I were an apparition, and showed evident signs of fear at this supernatural visitation ; Gillett, on the contrary, started forward with outstretched hands and a beaming smile to welcome me back to the land of the living. For an instant I forgot the mortal insult I imagined he had offered me, and half held out my hand ; then recollection returned, and muttering a few words to the effect that I had not incurred any particular danger to make such a fuss over, I turned on my heel and entered into conversation with Sethi, who was brimful of admiration at the awful havoc I had wrought, not only to Ambouli's palace, but also to the temple of Apap, as he persisted in calling the pyramid of Tlilcoatl.

As I was talking, it suddenly occurred to me that the ladies could not choose a better time than the present for taking refuge in the pyramid of Ra ; and as Sethi expressed his readiness to escort them thither, I urged the matter upon Amu's serious consideration. At first he seemed pleased with the idea, but after a moment's reflection decided that it would be better for them to remain where

they were, until he was forced to evacuate the place. His chief reason for coming to a decision so contrary to my wishes, was that they would be exposed to great danger in traversing the streets, and might even be captured by the Tlilcoatli guard on duty in the grand square. I urged and implored him to seriously reflect upon the imminent peril they courted by staying here, and was in the midst of an eloquent appeal when a messenger entered the atrium with news which effectually silenced me.

"I bring intelligence of disaster," he exclaimed, saluting his lord. "The guard in the King's palace has mutinied, and, aided by a large body of Tlileoatli, has disarmed the royal tribe."

"With all your means of gaining news, you failed to obtain this," I remarked to Sethi, who stood aghast at the magnitude of the calamity.

"Would that I had sought your advice earlier!" he moaned. "The Serpent has foiled the wisdom of Ra, and will rear his hideous head over the crushed and broken remains of the once glorious Olmec nation. The Egyptian dynasty will die with Cephren, the knowledge of Ra will cease with Sethi, and Apap, the accursed Serpent, will teach evil to the scattered remnant of the people."

"Things may not be so bad as you predict," I said, touched by the evident distress of the priest.

"What hope is there?" he asked. "The royal tribe is taken by surprise and deprived of its weapons; the Dees-munxiatl are shut up here within these walls, and must succumb to superior numbers; Cephren, whose authority might have rallied friends to his standard, is a prisoner. Where, then, are we to look for help, or whence are we to derive any hope? Your words were meant in kindness, but they fail to relieve my bursting heart, for now I know that the signs and portents I have recently witnessed, were sent to tell me that the death-knell of Olmi has struck."

"My chief regret is that you wasted your time in coming here, instead of calling the royal tribe to arms. If you

could have ousted the Tlilcoatl soldiers and held the grand square, we might have had a chance, but now it is, I fear, infinitesimal. By the bye, your return to the temple is completely cut off, so you will have to remain here."

"Not so," answered Sethi. "I must go back to set my house in order, and I can easily leave by the southern gate and re-enter the pyramid through the subterranean passage you know of."

These were the last words I ever spoke to the high priest of Ra, for he immediately took a solemn farewell of all, and departed to prepare for the death he imagined would soon overtake him. Whether he escaped from the wild upheaval and massacres which were already commencing, and whether he still continues to inculcate the doctrines of his venerable religion, I know not, and probably never shall know on this side of the grave. He was an enthusiast in his mysterious rites, and although he did not disdain to mix up a little worldly cunning with them, yet he was a good, honest, simple-hearted man, a true patriot, and a devoted friend. If he perished on that awful night when the Tlilcoatli—veritable serpents from the bottomless pit—let loose rapine and murder, may this be his requiem; that he desired the good of all, and wished harm to none. *Vale, vale*, kind friend! We shall meet again where all hearts are open, and where motives are understood.

Very shortly after Sethi left, our inaction came to an end by the announcement that the enemy was advancing to assault the gate. We all immediately dispersed to take up our several commands, with the understanding that, when the defence of the ramparts was no longer practicable, we should rally our men inside the wall we had so laboriously thrown up around the palace. The details of the terrible struggle that ensued would not be interesting reading. Over and over again the foe advanced fiercely to the assault, but the steady bravery of the defenders, aided by the terrific fire we kept up with our rifles, drove them back with fearful loss. The fight had lasted five hours when

Ambouli, enraged at the stubborn resistance which had cost him the lives of many of his best men, issued an order for the indiscriminate massacre of all men, women, and children found in the Deesmuniatl quarter. We at first only guessed at the atrocities which were being perpetrated, by groans and shrieks which rose above the din of battle, but we soon ascertained the dismal truth from the prisoners we made. These latter nearly fell victims to the fury of the soldiers, and it required all Amu's authority to prevent his followers from emulating the barbarous example of the Tilcoatli. To the last, the lord of the Diamond Cross would not suffer the Christian doctrine of mercy to lose one atom of its lustre in his hands, and as the Faith had been delivered unto him, so he kept it—unspotted, undefiled.

Two hours after midnight we were driven to take refuge behind the inner wall, and here, being more concentrated, we did even greater execution than before. But Ambouli, finding every assault futile, ordered up huge trunks of trees, which he employed as battering-rams with terrible effect upon the loosely piled-up stones. Although we directed a heavy fire against the men who wielded these engines, we only delayed the fatal rush, for shortly before daybreak several breaches had been made, and the enemy ceased hostilities to gather his forces for the final, irresistible assault.

Seeing that the last act of this terrible tragedy was about to commence, I thought the time had arrived for getting the ladies away from the city. I hurriedly pointed out to Amu the madness of waiting to receive the foe, and urged him to withdraw his men for the defence of the palace, whilst he was conducting his family to the canoes prepared to embark them. He was pale and exhausted from loss of blood, and Gillett, who had joined me, almost peremptorily ordered him to retire, at the same time telling the officers that they were to withdraw into the building the moment the Tilcoatl began to advance.

Whilst Gillett went with the Indians to secure our

property, I supported Amu into the atrium, and, leaving him there, hastily invaded the ladies' apartments and explained in a few words the hopelessness of prolonging the struggle, and the urgent necessity for their immediate departure. They bravely acquiesced in the inevitable, and snatching up one or two cherished treasures, accompanied me to the banqueting-hall, where we were joined by Gillett, the Indians, and a chosen phalanx of Deesmunxiatl warriors. The fearful uproar that reached us here, gave timely warning that the Tilcoatl had recommenced the assault, and would probably reach the interior of the palace before another quarter of an hour had elapsed. As any further delay might be fatal to our plans, we took a last survey of the magnificence that surrounded us, and then left the palace by a covered way which opened out on the borders of the lake. The enemy had possession of the gardens, but was so busily engaged in the assault that we were enabled to reach the postern without firing a single shot. However, as we passed through into the Street of the Rampart, a loud, fiendish yell of triumph told us that the Serpent-worshippers had burst into the palace, and were desecrating the halls hitherto unpolluted by the feet of the heathen. As the savage outburst of delight subsided, another one arose which filled us with horror, for it was a wild cry for quarter, mingled with the shrieks of the dying. Intoxicated with hatred, and rendered furious by the blood they had shed, the barbarians knew not the meaning of mercy, for the awful groans which assailed our ears only too plainly testified that the gallant followers of Amu were being massacred in cold blood !

Filled with unutterable disgust and impotent rage at these atrocities, I hurried our sorrowful procession through the southern gate and down the zigzags to the river. Here we found a small fleet of canoes awaiting us, which we quickly loaded with a cargo of humanity, and I experienced a profound sensation of relief when the boat containing Oosita pushed off, and was paddled rapidly down

stream. I had undertaken the responsibility of covering the embarkation, as Gillett was required by Amu, who was severely wounded, and in this duty I was assisted by Chotil and the Indians. In a very short space of time twelve canoes had been loaded and sent off, and I now ordered my men to commence preparations for their own embarkation. Barely a third of the packages had been stowed away on board when I saw a body of Tlilcoatlí appear on the summit of the hill, who, instantly perceiving us, began to descend the zigzags at a furious pace. As we should not have time to get off before they arrived, I called the Indians to arms, and no sooner were they ready than the Serpent-worshippers, headed by Ambouli, burst upon us. A well-directed fire checked their impetuosity and brought them to a standstill. At this moment the leader recognized me, and, with a yell of rage and defiance, made so sudden and agile a spring that it was miraculous how I escaped the murderous thrust of his lance, with nothing more serious than a slight flesh wound in the side. Had his right arm been uninjured, he would, in all probability, have finished my mortal career then and there. In my effort to evade his weapon, I somehow managed to run straight into his arms, which immediately clutched me with a vice-like grip. Although I was tolerably proficient in wrestling, yet as I felt my opponent's sinewy muscles contracting with iron grip around me, crushing my chest and driving every particle of breath out of my lungs, I was convinced I should only come off second best. When Ambouli imagined he had sufficiently reduced me to a most unhappy state of breathlessness, his hand went down to his girdle for the purpose of obtaining a dagger—a manœuvre I was determined to frustrate. My revolver, fortunately, was still in my possession, but hitherto I had been unable to use it without running the risk of injuring myself. I now thought that if I could disengage my arm, even ever so slightly, I might be able to lodge a bullet in my enemy's brain. Whatever I did would have to be

done quickly, for Ambouli was already overcoming the resistance I offered to his drawing the dagger. Cunning had saved me once before, and I therefore determined to try it on this occasion. All at once my struggles ceased, and I became thoroughly limp in his grasp. With an exclamation of triumph he threw me to the ground, and, quick as lightning, had his hand upon the dagger. But his movement had released me, and before he could use his weapon, I had fired two shots. The first was a miss, the result of over-excitement, but the second made him leap several feet into the air and brought him to the ground stone dead. As he fell, a shout of exultation arose from the Indians, followed by a rattling volley which completely discomfited the Thilcoatli, and sent them flying in all directions. After this we embarked in peace, and paddled hard to overtake our friends.

I felt a grim satisfaction at having been the instrument of justice in meting out death to Ambouli. His unbridled savagery and ambition had plunged a refined and peaceful city into all the horrors of rebellion and bloodshed, and at the moment when he thought success certain, Nemesis decreed his punishment. It fitted in well with the "eternal fitness of things," although my heart sank within me as I pictured his successor on the throne of Chalco, and the polished tribe of Ra-teotl and the refined Christian descendants of Deesmunx bowing their heads beneath the brutal yoke of the fiendish Serpent-worshippers. As we went rapidly down stream, I could not refrain from anathematizing the short-sighted policy of their forefathers whose generosity prompted them to grant an asylum to a set of almost savages, who never could have amalgamated with the venerable and antique civilization of the Egyptians, and whose only recommendation to fair treatment was the faintest trace of consanguinity, and the miserable plight they were in, when they first set foot on Atlicaliguian territory.



The first was a miss, the result of over-excitement, but the second made him leap several feet into the air and brought him to the ground stone dead.—*p. 360.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ROAD OF THE HIEROGLYPH ENDS IN HAPPINESS.

My reflections on the deplorable anarchy and barbarism which seemed likely to be the future lot of Chalco were speedily terminated by the advent of bands of Tlilcoatli, who made us run a terrible gauntlet through clouds of arrows, javelins, and stones. Execrations and yells greeted us every yard of the way, and to these we occasionally replied by a few shots which, for a short time, made the enemy disappear from the bank, but only to crop up again and again until dispersed by another volley. The most dangerous part of the journey was on that portion of the river which flowed past the Tlilcoatl quarter, for here the foe had planted some huge *balistæ* which flung enormous stones with such force and accuracy that we only escaped being sunk by a miracle. But my muscular Indians worked with a will, and paddled so vigorously that we got beyond range of these engines with nothing worse than a thorough soaking, but a little further on we fell in with a fleet of canoes filled with the foe. These latter looked as if they were inclined to be troublesome, for they closed up with the intention of barring our way; but a crashing volley threw them into confusion, and before they recovered sufficient temerity to attack us we had passed on some distance. After a short hesitation they discreetly decided not to attempt a pursuit, and we therefore continued the journey without any further molestation, and turned into

a branch of the river down which we had previously agreed to travel.

The stream in which we now were presented a straight reach over a mile in length, and I was therefore enabled to see everything that floated on its surface. I strained my eyes to discover the twelve canoes laden with our people, but to my surprise I could count only four ! The rest must have travelled with tremendous speed to have got out of sight so soon, or else must have met with some disaster. With a very uncomfortable sensation at my heart I directed the Indians to increase their speed, and in a few more minutes overhauled the hindmost boat, which was being paddled by Gillett and a Deesmunxiatl, whilst the ladies and Amu were lying down in the stern, probably as a precaution against the missiles of the Tlilcoatl. The coolness that subsisted between the doctor and me on account of his glib invectives against Oosita had in nowise subsided, and I therefore merely hauled my boat alongside to report that we had run the gauntlet without the loss of a single man. This done, I was about to push off again, secretly resolved to get Oosita into my canoe at the next halting-place, when Gillett's voice made me pause.

"Good heavens !" he exclaimed, in accents trembling with forebodings of evil ; "do drop that infernal formality in the presence of—of—"

"Of what ?" I asked impatiently.

"You must try to assume a little friendliness," continued the doctor, "for I have gone through enough to upset my reason. No sooner had we turned the corner out of your sight than we were intercepted by a fleet of canoes, with which we had a desperate struggle. Only half our boats got through, and of these two were afterwards sunk by those confounded *balistæ*. Not only have we to deplore the loss of many valiant soldiers, but also of our spare ammunition and provisions."

"This is bad news, but it is fortunate that the portion I

carried is intact," I answered, glancing wonderingly at Amu and his family lying so still in the boat. A great dread was beginning to steal over me ; I trembled violently, but dared not ask a question or endeavour to awake those whose placid sleep was so quiet as to be almost death-like. Sleep is the twin brother of death, I told myself ; one is a good imitator of the other when the body is worn out with fatigue, and therefore I was only needlessly alarming myself ; they would awake presently and greet me with their happy smiles.

Gillett noticed my extreme agitation, and attributed it to its proper cause. "Poor Oosita has fainted," he said, laying his hand on mine. "She will soon recover."

"Thank God!" I gasped out. "But what of Amu and the others?"

"They are sleeping a sleep from which they will never awake in this world," answered the doctor in solemn accents.

I was dumbfounded ; I could not speak a single word as I looked upon the peaceful faces of Amu, his wife, and daughter, and realized that their gracious life on earth was over—that their task here was complete. Great tears gathered in my eyes and rolled down my cheeks, as I felt I had been bereaved of friends whose loss could never be replaced, and I even forgot for a moment to be thankful that Oosita had been spared. If ever a man deserved well of humanity, it was the noble, large-hearted Amu, whose life had been rendered up for the welfare of his stranger guests. I have met many Christians before and since, but none have ever seemed to me to have surpassed or even equalled the sublime magnanimity and stupendous generosity of this dead chief. There, by the side of the sleeping hero, were the majestic lady Amu and her sweet daughter Eruna—two more victims to the baneful presence of the white man. There was no disguising the fact that we, and we alone, were almost directly responsible for all the horrible

carnage and massacres which had turned the fair city of Chalco into a veritable shambles. When we first arrived it was in the heyday of peace and prosperity, and although it contained the slumbering element of violence, it would have continued to sleep on had not a series of unfortunate *contresmps* forced us into collision with one section of the community. However, ours was no isolated case, for it seems the invariable rule that whenever the European comes in contact with native races, considerable friction must result, generally ending in some catastrophe. Nevertheless I am inclined to believe that if Amu had not been so exclusive in his dealings with the Tlilcoatli, we might have met Ambouli and disarmed his hostility by a little flattery, and the judicious expenditure of some of our vast wealth of tin.

But what was the use of speculating on what might have been, with these dead, upturned faces reminding me of the harsh and pitiless present ! There they were lying, with a calm beauty stealing over their motionless features — a beauty unmarred by any contortion or death agony. As I strained my eyes upon them with a fixed, grief-stricken gaze, I almost began to imagine I could detect a slight movement which indicated that life had not yet wholly departed. With feverish earnestness I pointed this out to Gillett, but he gravely shook his head.

“ Do not deceive yourself,” he said almost in a whisper. “ Amu and his wife were both shot through the heart, and died instantaneously ; Eruna was wounded in the chest, and only lingered for ten minutes in a state of unconsciousness.”

“ Poor Oosita ! ” I murmured. “ I dread her awaking to a sense of her awful desolation.”

“ She is a noble girl ! ” exclaimed Gillett impetuously. “ Whilst the arrows were flying thickly as we broke through the fleet of canoes, she sat calm and impassive as if a few rain-drops instead of deadly missiles were hurtling through the air. Busy as I was, I could not help noticing

and admiring such lofty courage. Then, when her father received his death-wound, and her mother hers barely half a minute later, she supported them in her arms without betraying any loss of moral control. I saw they were dead, and released her hands from their loving clasp just as Eruna was struck. This third shock unnerved her ; a spasm of pain passed over her face, but she quickly repressed it, and bent over her sister to staunch the flow of blood. A slight examination soon convinced me that Oosita was sisterless and an orphan. When the end came, and I gently laid the dead girl by her father, she gave me one look of intense agony and fell senseless. Never has my heart been so deeply stirred as it has been by this exhibition of hopeless human misery, and you cannot wonder that I told you when you came up that I was nearly mad. Even now I feel furious enough to pull back to Chalco and kill a few more of these Tlilcoatli, with Ambouli at their head, as a small set-off against the irreparable loss they have inflicted upon us."

"I took my revenge in anticipation," I said. "Ambouli will never sit on the throne of Cephren, for I drilled a hole through his vile carcass before embarking."

I gave Gillett an account of the fray which terminated in the Serpent chief's death, and whilst talking perceived that Oosita was beginning to recover from her swoon. I was about to step from my boat to go to her when the doctor stopped me.

"Leave her to herself for a little while," he whispered. Then seizing my hands, he continued—"Forgive me my hasty words concerning Oosita the other night, and believe me when I say that I retract every disparaging thing I said about her. Such a noble girl, the daughter of a hero, and made an orphan for our sakes, is too good even for the greatest prince of Europe. Her beauty, gentleness, and moral courage under most disastrous circumstances, raise her so far above the rest of her sex that I have completely

altered my previous opinion ; I now feel that you are not worthy of her, and that if you make her your wife you will only shine by reflected light."

I took Gillett's outstretched hand and wrung it hard.

"Remember," he continued, "that I am now Oosita's champion, and as the care of her future life will devolve upon you, I intend to see that you treat her properly. If you do not, by the science of Hippocrates—by the soul of Æsculapius—I'll—I'll blow your brains out !"

"I will give you full permission to do so if I make her unhappy," was my reply, as I again shook his hand and looked at him with redoubled affection. From that moment our friendship has never received a check, and I firmly believe it rivals that of Euryalus and Nisus, or even of David and Jonathan.

Meanwhile we had been travelling rapidly down stream, with a laudable desire to place as many miles as possible between us and our bloodthirsty enemies. Any idea we may have entertained of returning to Chalco to rally the followers of Cephren was utterly dissipated by Amu's death, and Gillett and I both agreed that our wisest plan was to make for civilization as quickly as possible. At nightfall we pulled into the left bank, and made preparations for some needful rest. I lifted Oosita, dazed and stunned by her awful bereavement, from the boat, and carefully protected her with wraps from the chill night air of the swamps. At last she sank into a restless, troubled slumber, and I felt free to close my weary eyes. But sleep refused to come at my bidding ; all the bewildering events of the day passed in review before me, culminating in the swift death of our brave chief. Frequently during the night I got up and went to the canoe containing the mortal remains of our friends, and gazed earnestly upon their placid dead faces. They all three bore such sweet expressions of resignation and happiness that I found it hard to persuade myself I should never hear them welcome me again in their

marvellously gracious manner. Seen in the full flood of a rich tropical moonlight, their features appeared to have plainly imprinted on them many virtues which I had only dimly recognized during life, but which were now so visibly impressed on the cold clay that it almost seemed as if a Mighty Hand had done it for the comfort of the sorrowing ones who were left behind.

Whilst I was contemplating the dead forms of my friends, a Deesmunxiatl officer as restless as myself accosted me.

"The lord of the Diamond Cross must be laid with his forefathers in the pyramid of Xexuteotl; he cannot be consigned to the water or the earth—our law forbids it."

"Is it so?" I asked. "But how can you gain safe access to the city when it is in the hands of a murderous foe?"

"The Tlilcoatl will respect our customs when we go back and tell them that our chief is slain, and when we offer to submit to the lord of the Ruby Serpent."

"It will please the Princess Oosita if it can be done," I answered.

"Ah, and what of our lady?" asked the officer eagerly. "Will she return to rule over her tribe?"

"Can she go back to bow her head beneath the yoke of the heathen?" I exclaimed sternly. "Is it right for a weak woman to stand alone in a city of turbulence, to be crushed by the violence of one party or another? I will not permit her to wear herself out in the hopeless task of governing savages, and she will therefore accompany me to England as my wife."

"But there are many Deesmunxiatl here in this camp who fully expect you to lead them back to victory, and to become the lord of the Diamond Cross in virtue of your union to the princess. This marriage has long been foreseen, and is extremely popular with us."

"You and your friends are very kind," I replied. "But in my present plight, almost destitute of arms and ammunition, it would be impossible to organize victory, and there-

fore I must refuse to stir up any more bloodshed. The princess and I must go our way, and I can only wish you and the rest of the tribe a fair modicum of happiness under your new masters."

"Must the race of Amu be lost to us?" he exclaimed mournfully. "Well, be it so; I will return to Chalco, to pay the last respect to the mortal remains of my noble chief, and then will set my house in order." He went away as he spoke to conceal his emotion, and I threw myself on to a soft couch of moss and immediately fell into a deep, dreamless slumber.

With the first appearance of daylight we began our preparations for sending back the corpses to Chalco in charge of the Deesmunxiatl who had accompanied us thus far. I had gently sounded Oosita upon the subject, and obtained her sanction for the course I wished to pursue. She was particularly desirous that her parents should be laid in the Christian pyramid, and be overshadowed by the saint-like halo that clung around the mausoleum of their ancestor Desmonde; at the same time, she expressed her willingness to forsake her native land for ever, and make my country her own.

The last sacred leave-takings were over, and the bitter tears flowed freely as the Deesmunxiatl, with their sad load of what was once a glorious humanity, pushed off into mid-stream and plied their paddles, which flashed and sparkled in the morning sun like showers of diamonds as the spray fell off them. We watched them growing dimmer and dimmer in the distance until a bend of the river shut them, their lives, their civilization, their hopes and their fears, from out of our sight for ever.

Oosita, until now so brave and calm, burst into a passionate torrent of weeping, and wild, long-pent-up sobs of anguish convulsed her frame. I took her to my arms, and soothed her as she moaned forth her intolerable grief and her awful sense of desolation. She continued for hours in

this state, whilst I sat perfectly still, with her slender form held close to me, and only whispering from time to time words of consolation and endearment. It was a fearful thing to me to witness such mental anguish, and to feel my utter incapacity to assuage it ; yet I thank God she had given me her heart's love before that terrible time of trial, for I am convinced that had she been entirely bereft of any one to whom she could cling for comfort in her bitterest grief, she would have sobbed her life away, and would soon have been laid to rest by the side of her unfortunate parents.

During the days that followed, I relinquished all the cares of the expedition to Gillett and occupied myself entirely with Oosita. The doctor was uneasy at the intense melancholy which had settled upon her when the first violent outburst of grief passed away, and he begged me to divert her mind from its sorrowful groove by every means in my power. Needless it is to say that I did all that love could prompt to arouse her interest once more in life. By degrees my devotion was rewarded with a rare smile, and encouraged by these signs of an awakened mind, I redoubled my exertions, which at last received their reward. I had been paying her some of my usual attentions, when she looked at me very sweetly, and motioned me to sit down by her side. As soon as I had done this, she nestled close to me and spoke in her natural, low, soft voice, from which the harsh ring of grief had entirely departed.

“ How many days is it since we left Chaleo ? ” she asked.

“ Five,” I replied, wondering at the question.

“ Is it so long as that ? ” she exclaimed. “ But my memory is a complete blank as to what has happened since that awful moment when father, mother, and sister were taken from me so cruelly. Stay,” she continued, placing her dear little hand in mine, “ I am not correct in saying that I remember nothing during all these sad days, for I have a very vivid recollection of the infinite tenderness

and patience of one whose ministrations have brought me back to life."

I trembled with delight as I listened to her words, uttered so calmly, yet with such sweet pathos. Tears of joy rushed to my eyes, and I pressed the lovely princess to my heart with an emotion of gladness almost painful in its intensity.

"Forgive me for my excess of grief," she murmured. "It must have caused you deep anxiety. I begin to see now that I have not been thankful enough to Xexuteotl for granting me your love—a love sent to assuage my anguish and lead me to happiness."

"Are you still determined to turn your back on Chaleo?" I asked presently. "Your tribe will joyfully accept you as its Queen, and you need fear no persecution from Ambouli, for he is dead!"

"My pleasant home, with all its sweet associations, exists no longer save as an oasis in my memory," she answered with a sigh. "Were I to go back, it would be to endless regret for things that once were and never can be again. No, no," she went on, as a deep blush suffused her face, "I will go forward with my promised husband and learn a new happiness in pleasing him."

"It shall be exactly as you wish," I replied. "Perhaps a time may come when you may desire to see the home of your fathers once more. Should it happen so, promise to tell me, and I will conduct you there with an army and guns enough to sweep away in an instant the most formidable opposition the Thilcoatli could offer. Promise me this!"

"I will do so, if ever the wish becomes overwhelming. But at present I am more anxious to go far away into what you call the land of civilization."

On the afternoon of this eventful day which brought joy to my heart, and wreathed the sympathetic doctor's brow with smiles, we arrived at a spot on the low marshy banks

which presented so familiar an aspect that we landed to look about us. Presently I came upon the figure of Osiris, and then it flashed across me that this was the place whence we had toiled through the swamps to Chalco, and close to which I had had my presentiment of coming disaster. It was strange that I should reach this landmark again just as I had overcome all perils, and was taking back to my native land as beautiful a bride as ever the sun shone upon. I regarded this chance meeting with Osiris as a joyous omen for the future, and, for a wonder, Gillett laughingly endorsed my happy superstition.

From this point we had recourse to the plan known in Chalco as the road of the Hieroglyph, a copy of which had been presented to us by Sethi. The map traced out the route whereby we could travel from Chalco to Mexico, making use of the waterways of the Amazon and the Rio Negro. It is not my intention to divulge the secret of the road, for I still have sufficient pity left for the Atlicaligui, or rather for the Deesmunxiatl portion of them, to preserve them from the greedy speculator and the crowd of ruffians he brings in his train. It is a wonder to me that this veritable El Dorado has so long remained hidden from the world, for I happen to know that, in one direction, the outposts of civilization are not more than a hundred and fifty miles distant from it. Indeed, I often take up my newspaper in the morning almost expecting to see some sensational telegram from Rio Janeiro, announcing the discovery of enormous quantities of gold in the province of Alto Amazonas! Until that happens, I will be discreetly silent, and help to shield the amiable and virtuous Deesmunxiatl from the contaminating influences of the white man's rum and gunpowder, seasoned with a few Biblical morals—which morals are thrown out, I suppose, as a hint to the innocent native that the pale-face knows how he ought to behave, but that he prefers, in dealing with coloured people, to side with any other god than the One he professes to believe in!

After another week's pleasant travelling through the charming scenery of typical South American forests, we, following the instructions in the map of the Hieroglyph, turned into a stream which ran in a north-easterly direction. By careful observations, Gillett came to the conclusion that we were on either the Purus or Madeira river, both tributaries of the Amazon. This was delightful news, for we now began to hope that we should soon get into the track of civilization. Subsequent events proved that we were on the Purus, and by meeting a backwoodsman we gained the information necessary to enable us to reach the flourishing town of Manaos. From this point our troubles ceased, and Oosita's interest in life redoubled. Her genuine delight, slightly mixed with fear, at the steamer which conveyed us to Para, was the source of much amusement to me. No one beside myself ever knew her terror as the leviathan of the deep poured forth its thick volumes of smoke, and sounded its whistle for the passengers to come on board. I quieted her movement of fear, and seeing me so unconcerned, she instantly recovered her presence of mind, and commenced talking to Gillett as if she had been accustomed to steamboats all her life!

When we arrived at Para, the crowning happiness of my life took place by my marriage. The doctor gave the bride away, Chotil officiated as best man, and our gallant band of Indians stood by watching the ceremony with awestruck eyes, and when they finally understood that the princess had become my "squaw," they gave vent to their satisfaction with many guttural "Ughs!" Since Gillett had acted the part of father to my bride, he thought it was his duty to treat me to a long lecture on the responsibilities I had vowed to take cheerfully upon myself. I listened in all humility until he became carried away by the magnitude of his subject, and began to use threats.

"By the soul of *Æsculapius*," he exclaimed in his excitement, "if I find that you are not fulfilling any one of these

duties, I will paralyze your *levatores palpebrarum* and produce such intense *ecchymosis* of your *conjunctivæ*, that you shall not be able to look upon your lovely wife for at least a month!"

"The punishment would be more than I could bear," I answered, laughing heartily. "In fact it has begun already, for my eyes ache terribly from having had to watch those long words as they fell from your lips!"

"Pooh!" ejaculated Gillett, seeing that I was getting into what he called a dangerous mood, by which he meant a state of mind which predisposed me to turn everything he said into ridicule. "I have given you fair warning of the penalties attached to any dereliction of your matrimonial duties. Having thus relieved my mind, I am ready to attack the wedding breakfast."

Through all the excitement and bustle of that day, and through all the busy scenes I have been an actor in since, there has remained in my memory the one look of trustful confidence and love which my sweet bride gave me, as she placed her hand in mine at the conclusion of the ceremony, and called me in her soft English by the sacred name of husband. In that single expressive look I probed for an instant the vast depth of her love, and derived from it a perfect assurance of undying happiness.

We did not linger long in South America, for neither its climate, nor its peculiar phase of my boasted civilization, were particularly enchanting. At Buenos Ayres we dismissed our gallant Indian band with handsome presents and many regrets, but, as Chotil obstinately declared he would never leave the Machi Gillett, we were almost forced to continue him in our service. For six months after our arrival in Europe we wandered through the sunny south, and visited those magnificent old Italian cities whose venerable antiquity is a never-failing source of wonderment and awe. I had a twofold purpose to serve in making this protracted tour amongst all that is grand in art and architecture.

The first was to gradually acclimatize my bride to keener airs and rougher breezes than had ever assailed her in her tropical home; the second was to educate her in our European manners and customs, so that by the time we reached England she might be fitted to hold her own against any one.

At last, when the balmy air of June was blowing softly over our lovely heaths and moors, I brought my princess to the land she was henceforth to call home, and from which her brave and unfortunate ancestor had sailed, with a heart beating high with hope, more than two hundred and twenty years ago. How little he dreamed that a fellow-countryman of his, a true Devonian to boot, would, two centuries later, bring back his beautiful descendant to her proper position in society in her own native county!

Thus ended my love for roaming in an all-absorbing love for a beautiful wife, and thus ended Gillett's dream of fabulous wealth. He expected to come back from El Dorado with an enormous fortune, and would most certainly have done so had it not been for the ferocious animosity of Ambouli. As it was, we lost nearly everything we possessed during our flight from Chalco, and when we arrived at Manaos were penniless beggars. Poor Gillett, contrary to his hopes, has now to struggle at a laborious profession, and he sometimes works himself into a most unphilosophical exhibition of temper when he thinks of the thousands of tons of gold that litter the streets of Chaleo, and feels how hard he has to work here to obtain even an ounce of that El Dorado dross. I have only come across one person who has an utter contempt for gold, and he is Chotil. He gravely reproves the Machi for his outbursts of anger at his deficiency in the glittering yellow metal, but the Souchi chief has not yet learned the uses to which it can be put in England; he comes from a country where all the rich and varied products of a bounteous earth are his for the taking, and he has not yet realized that if

John Smith helps himself to an apple from Farmer Hodge's orchard, he renders himself liable to divers terrible pains and penalties. Residence in a northern climate has had the effect of so far unbending the chief's habitual stolidity, that he has on several occasions been known to express his delight at the novelty of everything around him. He was particularly proud of himself when we arrayed him from head to foot in British *toga*, and informed him that henceforth it was to be his attire. But these sons of the Pampas are with difficulty weaned from their old habits, for only a month ago I was astonished to see my house surrounded by a large crowd, and on looking out to ascertain the cause, perceived Chotil standing on the doorstep in the full war-paint of a chief of the Souchi Indians. As that was not quite the correct thing for Mayfair, both Gillett and I gave him a severe lecture, which I hope will have the desired effect. Anyhow there has been no repetition of the ludicrous scene as yet.

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Most, if not all, of my friends who have taken the trouble to wade through this record of adventure, will at once guess who the men are who have assumed the pseudonyms of Gillett and Wrenforth. They will recognize without the least difficulty my lovely foreign wife, about whose nationality there has been so much speculation. The balance of opinion has been, I know, in favour of her being Italian, and the revelation of her Anglo-Egyptian descent will therefore cause considerable surprise.

Gillett's prophecy on that ever-memorable night, when we had our first and only quarrel, that marriage with the Princess Oosita would drag me down and ruin me socially for ever, has happily been completely falsified. To those who have recognized me under my assumed name there is no need to tell the sequel, but to those who know me not I can affirm this—that no man's social triumphs have ever been greater, or have been more due to his wife than mine.

Within three months of her presentation to her gracious Majesty she had established a *coterie* of her own, which looks up to her as its leader. Her marvellous adaptability to the requirements of society, her quick wit, her soft Italian-English, her sweet simplicity, combined with her graceful beauty, soon gained her the affection of the good and true, and obtained for her the flattering notice of royalty.

For myself, my deep contentment and happiness know no bounds. Every day brings its fresh delights, and adds some new charm to my lovely wife. I am deeply thankful that Gillett's persuasive powers overcame my repugnance to starting on what I once characterized as a "wild-goose chase after El Dorado," for in that land of gold and precious stones I obtained a priceless gem, so incomparable, so rare, that I do not believe such another exists in the whole world. To obtain my Oosita's equal, one would have to search in the realms of the angels.

THE END.

